

THE CORE WAY: THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY AND THE CIVIL  
RIGHTS MOVEMENT

1942-1968

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## ABSTRACT

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) pursued a vision to bring racial harmony to a nation divided. CORE—regionally known as the Chicago Committee of Racial Equality—began in the spring of 1942 in Chicago through the work of James Farmer, George Houser, Bernice Fisher, Homer Jack, James Robinson, and Joe Guinn. This group of young idealists directed its attention to social action and according to August Meier and Elliott Rudwick applied Gandhian techniques of nonviolent direct action to the resolution of racial conflict in the United States.<sup>1</sup> **THE CORE WAY: THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT—1942-1968** reexamines CORE, its members, philosophies, and transitions.

Chapter one, *A New Reflection: Revisiting the Voices of CORE's Past—The Birth of CORE 1942*, looks at the formation of the organization in 1942 and the development of its foundational principles and ideas. Chapter two, *Reconciling the Journey of Reconciliation: The Revealing of the Congress of Racial Equality—1947*, looks at the Journey of Reconciliation and how CORE put into practice nonviolent direct action—one of its main ideological principles. Chapter three, *Until the Cup That We Drink from Is the Very Same: The 1961 CORE Freedom Ride*, builds upon chapter two with a look at the Freedom Ride of 1961. It chronicles the overwhelming commitment of the organization to racial integration and harmony. Chapter four, *We're Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: The Transitional CORE Years—1960-1966*, begins to highlight the fracturing of CORE and its transition away from some of its traditional initiative, campaigns, but more

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<sup>1</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, "How CORE Began," *Social Science Quarterly*, (March 1969), 789-799.

importantly foundational principles. Finally, chapter five, The Opening of Pandora's Box: CORE at a Crossroads, examines the shift away from the original goals of CORE and the creation of a new direction.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I don't feel no ways tired,  
I've come too far from where I started from.  
Nobody told me that the road would be easy,  
I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me.

*Curtis Burrell*

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.

*Ecclesiastes 9:11*

But to he that shall endure unto the end.

*Mark 13:13*

Many special people contributed to this personal journey and victory. I am forever indebted to their support and faith over these years. First to my mother, Barbara Ann Johnson, I cannot thank you enough for making the personal sacrifices over the years. I see you in me everyday that I grow a little older. You instilled in me an unwavering work ethic that I drew upon greatly during this past year. You are one of the strongest and most intelligent women I know on this earth and I love you dearly. To my grandmother, Birda Robinson, I thank you for your untiring endurance and for being the strong matriarch of the Johnson family. Without you, I would not have been possible. I love you and miss you every day. To my brother, Chris Lamont Johnson, you are a remarkable man and truly an inspiration to me. You have been a source of strength over these past twelve years. I could not have achieved this success without you. My love for you is unconditional and I am ready now to be your source of strength. Whatever you need, I am there with it.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Cecil and Neatreal Alexander. I will not forget your generosity in my time of need. I love you both dearly for your help in the completion of this degree. To Dixie and Gina Haggard, thank you both for lighting a fire

underneath me and for not allowing me to walk away. I love you both dearly for that. To Dr. Ayanna Bridges and Dr. Melissa Renfrow, thank you for helping me compile these chapters into a decent looking dissertation. Both of you helped me maintain my sanity in the last days. To Pastor Marvin Joe Jackson and Pastoral Assistant Patricia A. Jackson, thank you for your spiritual guidance and prayers over the years. Both of you helped me remain steadfast in this arduous journey.

To my committee members, Dr. Elizabeth MacGonagle, Dr. James Woelful, Dr. Ted Wilson, I know it took a little longer than anyone, including myself expected, but you all were kind and gracious enough to stick with me, and I will be forever grateful. A special thank you to Dr. Jeffrey Moran, you stepped in when I needed an additional advisor and I will not forget that act of kindness. You are truly a gem. To Dr. William Tuttle, I was truly blessed to have you as my main advisor at the University of Kansas. You have shaped and molded me into the instructor I am today and for that, I am grateful. I could not have reached this point without you. I have learned to appreciate your red pen and editing comments and I am a better student and person because of it.

To my father, Charles William Johnson, I thank you for being a strong, driven, and determined father. You instilled in me these qualities at a very young age and these qualities have contributed to the completion of this dissertation and degree. The solace of your unconditional love over these years has calmed me when I was anxious and kept me focused when I wanted to veer off course. I cherish your intellectual prowess and look forward to many more father and daughter discussions. I am so proud to be your daughter. You are truly one of a kind, and I am the lucky one.

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## THE CORE OF IT: THE JOURNEY OF THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

I must admit I have lived an extremely privileged life. The idea of struggling or going without has never crossed my mind and until this day, I can honestly say that type of mentality does not exist for me. My parents endowed me with luxuries and necessities and instilled the confidence in me to understand I can do anything I set my mind on. I went to the best of schools and was exposed to all types of cultures. I never truly understood the concept of limitations due to ethnicity until I began to study history—especially American history. Now, I may come across as somewhat spoiled, naïve, even arrogant, but it is because of this comfortable life, I believe I appreciate the never-ending efforts of CORE in their initial years. Understanding these men and women and their actions are a doorway for me to understand that my comfortable life came at a cost from this previous generation. I can still recall asking my parents about their childhood, teenage and young adulthood years, where segregation in schools and neighborhoods was the norm. My father being an open book expressed to me the deplorable reality of my great-grandfather being addressed as boy in Halls, Tennessee by white residents or my mother living on the all black Harriet street in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The idea of second-class citizenship was a reality for my parents and grandparent's generation, while for me it is an historical construct to explore and teach.

These personal stories of struggle, discrimination and limitation intrigued me and left the budding historian in me wanting to know more. It is not enough to make brief mention of these individuals and their actions; but it is crucial that each new generation—especially the young African-American generation—realize the past is relevant today. Only a few decades separate this generation from the Jack Spratt Coffeehouse and



Stoners restaurant discriminatory policies. These events are a reflection of the struggles not only for African-Americans but also for our nation in its quest for the democratic dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Congress of Racial Equality played a fundamental part in this pursuit. Its goals, desires, actions, philosophies, and difficulties contributed to the society that exists today. Now, I am not arguing today's society is fully equal, but without the nonviolent direct action campaigns of CORE during the Civil Rights Movement, the plausibility of having Barrack Obama as the president of the United States is rather small. The concept of CORE was innovative in 1942. They pursued alternative tactics to the problem of inequality in the United States and attacked this inequality at its core. CORE envisioned an American society that rejected racial inequality and worked toward a nation in harmony. For CORE members having unity, love, and peace internationally was pointless if these same elements did not exist internally in the United States. Jack Spratt Coffeehouse and Stoner's restaurant was the start of CORE, but its nonviolent direct action platform grew and spread across this country and penetrated into every aspect of American life. CORE brought about substantive change in this nation. In order to understand the movement, one must appreciate the people and organizations involved in the movement. They reflect both internally and externally the tumultuous period in which our nation battled between racial segregation and racial harmony.

CORE was a part of that battle during the movement. It began as an organization committed to racial integration and racial harmony. As James Robinson, a CORE member stated, "this country will achieve integration, and CORE's nonviolent direct

action will make the process less [acidic].”<sup>2</sup> Yet, as time passed, the organization lost that commitment and redirected itself in a new direction. This dissertation takes a look at the journey of CORE from an organization committed to racial equality to one committed to a strong Black Nationalism platform. The once united organization with its platform of nonviolent direct action was gone and in its place was a new CORE order. The goal of this dissertation is to understand the reasons why this change took place. Was it the white paternalistic leadership, the new urban black members, or frustration over the lack of true equality existing in this country? Through exhaustive use of the CORE Archives from the State Historical Society of Madison, Wisconsin, the August Meier papers from the Schomburg Center at the New York Library, and a plethora of books, articles, and documentaries I have presented how CORE transitioned from the goal of racial integration to Black Nationalism.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with James Robinson in August Meier Papers at Schomburg Center, New York Public Library.

## A NEW REFLECTION: REVISTING THE VOICES OF CORE'S PAST

### CHAPTER ONE: THE BIRTH OF CORE: 1942

My mother, Barbara Ann Frierson Johnson, was just a year old when her father moved the family from Tuscaloosa, Alabama to Ypsilanti, Michigan in 1940. My grandfather wanted a better life for his wife and five daughters. He envisioned the North as a place of opportunity and prosperity. Ypsilanti was a better place for my grandfather and his family. He was able to work and provide for his family. He even built their home on the famous Harriet Street.<sup>3</sup> This place was much better than the Jim Crow south he moved his family out of, or was it. My grandfather easily recognized Jim Crow in the South. He knew his place as a black man in Alabama and acted accordingly. Moving North was a chance for change, but in reality, my grandfather faced segregation and racism. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) grew out of this environment of segregation and racism.

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) existed long before a group of young radicals in Chicago decided to form an interracial organization devoted to destroying racial inequality. The seeds of the organization rest in the pacifist principles of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a progressive organization that surfaced after World War I. Members of the FOR believed that the beneficial measures of peace and non-violence solved the problems facing humanity. These men and women opposed war and inequality. Within this initial FOR vision is where CORE developed. The FOR became

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<sup>3</sup> Harriet Street was the first glimpse of segregation for my grandfather in the North. Harriet Street housed all the black families that lived in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The house he built still stands today in an integrated neighborhood.

the architectural blueprint for future CORE chapters. One must look at the origin and vision of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in order to understand CORE.

“We are at one in Christ and can never be at war,”<sup>4</sup> stated English Quaker Henry Hodgkin and German Lutheran Friedrich Sigmund-Schulze, who were determined to ignite a worldwide pursuit to end war. Their pledge encouraged 130 Christians globally, of all denominations, to come together in 1914 in Cambridge, England, to denounce war. Out of this gathering, the Fellowship of Reconciliation established an international religious antiwar movement. Five basic principles united members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation:

1. That love as revealed and interpreted in the life and death of Jesus Christ involves more than we have yet seen, that is the only power by which evil can be overcome and the only sufficient basis of human society.
2. That, in order to establish a world-order based on Love, it is incumbent upon those who believe in this principle to accept it fully, both for themselves and in relation to others and to take the risks involved in doing so in a world which does not yet accept it.
3. That therefore, as Christians, we are forbidden to wage war, and that our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal, and to Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life-service for the enthronement of Love in personal, commercial, and national life.
4. That the Power, Wisdom, and Love of God stretch far beyond the limits of our present experience, and that He is ever waiting to break forth into human life in new and larger ways.
5. That since God manifests Himself in the world through men and women, we offer ourselves to His redemptive purpose to be used by Him in whatever way He may reveal to us.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Quote from Henry Hodgkin and Friedrich Sigmund-Schulze. Fellowship of Reconciliation Papers. Library of Political and Economic Science HUB Archives. London, England.

<sup>5</sup> Quote from Henry Hodgkin and Friedrich Sigmund-Schulze. Fellowship of Reconciliation Papers. Library of Political and Economic Science HUB Archives. London, England.

The members of the FOR were pacifists who wanted to change mentalities on a global level. They were committed to the absolutist form of pacifism, which states that “all forms of violence, war, and killing [are] unconditionally wrong.”<sup>6</sup> These men and women, ranged in age, culture, and nationality, but together they envisioned a world that solved its problems through dialogue and not military action. They were all pacifists who proclaimed and labeled themselves conscientious objectors to all wars. The Fellowship of Reconciliation began an American chapter in Garden City, Long Island, in 1915. This chapter engaged in “waging peace” in the pursuit of ending all wars and spreading its political and religious ideology of pacifism. “The Fellowship,” according to Calvin Craig Miller author of No Easy Answers: Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement, “did not believe achieving peace was a passive process, gained only by avoiding war.”<sup>7</sup> Rather, these men and women centered their rhetoric on the idea of Christian love and peace. “To know in one’s inmost being,” John D’Emilio lamented, “the unity of all men in God; to express love at every moment and in every relationship, to be channels of this quiet and unobtrusive, persistent force which is always there... this is the meaning of pacifism.”<sup>8</sup> One main purpose of the Fellowship was to create an environment in which people embraced this notion of Christian love

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<sup>6</sup> Maire A. Dugan, “Nonviolence and Nonviolent Direct Action.” Beyond Intractability. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. (Posted: September 2003)

<sup>7</sup> Calvin Craig Miller, No Easy Answers: Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement, (Morgan Reynolds: Greensboro, North Carolina, 2005) 47.

<sup>8</sup> John D’Emilio, Lost Prophet: The Life and times of Bayard Rustin, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 2003) 43.

and peace. “A.J. Muste, the chief executive of the American chapter eloquently summarized the platform of FOR: “If I can’t love Hitler, I can’t love at all.”<sup>9</sup> This was the embodiment of the organization, which encouraged people to hate the sin, but love the sinner. “Either we ought to resign from the world,” Muste noted, “... or else we must resolutely carry our political task to the end.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the FOR’s major “political tasks” was the resolute support of conscientious objectors. During World War II, three major figures within the Fellowship, as well as future CORE co-founders, were George Houser, James Farmer, and Bayard Rustin, all of whom confronted the power of the government to draft them into the war. For resisting the legal authority of the government to draft men into the Army, George Houser was among the first to be sentenced to a year and a day in 1940.

Bayard Rustin’s battle for conscientious objection proved more complicated than Houser’s resistance and imprisonment. By 1943, when he received his order from the draft board to report for a physical examination, Rustin felt that religious objection to the war was not the only legitimate option to oppose the war. Whether religious or non-religious, Rustin believed that an individual had the right to exercise his freedom of conscience. Rustin argued to the draft board:

I cannot voluntarily submit to an order stemming from the selective service act. War is wrong, Conscription is a concomitant of modern war.... Conscription for war is inconsistent with freedom of conscience, which is not merely the right to believe but to act on the degree of truth that one receives,... I regret that I must break the law of the State. I am prepared for whatever may follow.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Miller, No Easy Answers, 47.

<sup>10</sup> John D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Jervis Anderson, Bayard Rustin: Troubles I’ve Seen, (New York: NY: Harper Collins: 1997) 98.

At protest rallies across the nation, Rustin echoed the above sentiment to young men. This action sealed his fate with the United States draft board. Rustin was arrested for his vocalized objection to the war, and on February 17, 1944, he was found guilty of resisting the Selective Service System. Rustin was sentenced to three years in federal prison, a harsher sentence than Houser, due in part to his urging of other men to burn their draft cards. Rustin spent a total of twenty-seven months in the Federal Correctional Institution in Ashland, Kentucky; upon his release in August 1945 he appeared emotionally and physically drained, but still devoted to conscientious objection, pacifism, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation.<sup>12</sup>

James Farmer chose to submit a DSS Form 47, the form to apply for conscientious objector status. Farmer's experience was indicative of the average conscientious objector and pacifist. From a religious and humanitarian standpoint, people of different cultures and nationalities had a process in place to avoid the destructive nature of violence and wars. Farmer relied on this process. In his letter to the draft board, he wrote that for two reasons, fighting in any war was not an option for him. One, Farmer argued, was his "unalterable opposition to war" because war was an action of mass murder; and, two, "there was simply no way [he] could, in conscience, enter the United States' racially segregated armed forces to fight for freedom, liberty, and equality on other parts of the globe."<sup>13</sup> Farmer, like Houser and Rustin, was willing to go to jail to uphold the principles of conscientious objection, but the draft board

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<sup>12</sup> John D'Emilio, Lost Prophet, Picture 9 page four.

<sup>13</sup> James Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985) 81.

deferred him labeling him a “minister of the gospel.”<sup>14</sup> Houser, Rustin, and Farmer were conscientious objectors and devout pacifists on a “personal moral” journey, a journey that prevented them from “violating the principles of Christian fellowship.”<sup>15</sup> Engrained in the actions of the Fellowship was the literal belief that “I am my brother’s keeper.”

Waging peace, while a commendable goal, was a difficult struggle. To ensure the success of the FOR platform, Muste and other Fellowship members adopted the Gandhian principle of non-violent direct action or Satyagraha. Muste, a devout follower of Gandhi, noted that “pacifism with Gandhi [was] not a tool you pick up or lay down, use today but not tomorrow.... It was a way of life.”<sup>16</sup> Pacifists like Muste wanted people to understand not only that war damaged governments, but also that it decimated the essence of humanity.

The Gandhian technique of Satyagraha became the political vehicle through which the FOR sought to achieve its pacifist and egalitarian ideals. Literally meaning “truth force,” Satyagraha was part of a process for achieving love, peace, and the destruction of war. As Richard Gregg, an American Quaker, argued in the “The Power of Nonviolence,” the use of non-violent resistance became a “moral jujitsu” in which an opponent “loses” his moral balance” because violence as a legitimate response is eliminated.

Nonviolent direct action became a moral principle in which, fellowship members’ endured violent action in the hopes of converting their opponents. “Conversion

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<sup>14</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 82.

<sup>15</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, No Easy Answers, 49.



[removed],” Bo Wirmark noted in *Nonviolent Methods and the American Civil Rights Movement* that, “the opponent’s reason for resisting, rather than his ability to resist. It [made] him accept a more favorable image of the campaigner and regard his aim as legitimate.”<sup>17</sup> While the hope of using nonviolent direct action was to change the mentality of the opponent, it was not the main objective. Quite often, persuading the opponent to accept the “new image of the nonviolent actor, an image which [discouraged] the use of violence against him/her...”<sup>18</sup> was the goal of the Fellowship’s nonviolent direct action. The FOR and CORE wanted to eliminate social injustice in the face of violence. These men and women worked toward stripping agency away from violence with peaceful nonviolent tactics. The FOR and CORE, unlike their counterparts, gave greater agency to their own cause in not resorting to violence. The FOR believed that, “Gandhi’s philosophy, nonviolence—not just non-injury but positive goodwill toward the evildoer—was the indispensable cornerstone of ethical action. Nonviolence was not just a means to other ends, it was itself the highest end, and all other goals were subordinate to it. There was no desirable political goal that would not be compromised and distorted were violence used to attain it. Gandhi counseled his followers that if they perfected their means, desirable ends would inevitably follow.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bo Wirmark, “Nonviolent Methods and the American Civil Rights Movement 1955-1965,” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1974): 115. <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed October 13, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Wirmark, “Nonviolent Methods,” 115.

<sup>19</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1948) and M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Triplicane, Madras: S. Ganesan, 1928).

This belief solidified the Fellowship's Christian pacifist ideologies and its moral commitment to work for revolutionary change through nonviolent means.

The FOR wanted to rid the world of war through peaceful action. Gandhi and his philosophy of Satyagraha was a means to that end. This new social struggle for the Fellowship manifested into social actions. The Harlem Ashram was one of these actions. This interracial living experiment established in 1940 by Jay Holmes Smith, a Methodist minister who spent close to a decade in India studying Satyagraha, created an environment that “developed spiritual discipline and cultivated an ascetic Gandhian sensibility.”<sup>20</sup> While its residents noted numerous flaws, from the dingy dirty rooms to the awful food, the community living there fostered an environment that applied the principles of Satyagraha to the pacifist and civil rights movements developing in the United States. Smith created a place where pacifists enhanced their intellectual understanding of Gandhian principles of nonviolent direct action. These peace radicals read influential works, such as Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience; *The Power of Violence*, by Richard Gregg; *The Conquest of Violence*, by Bartolomeo de Ligt; and the most influential War Without Violence, by Krishnalal Shridharani. These works, especially Shirdharani's War Without Violence became, as Rustin noted, “our gospel, our bible.”<sup>21</sup> Reverend Glen Smilley, a FOR staff member, recalled that, “a small number of people in New York , including A.J. Muste, A. Philip Randolph, and John Haynes, met to discuss [Shirdharani's] book and its possible application to the racial

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson, Troubles, 70.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, Troubles, 69.

conditions in the United States.”<sup>22</sup> These men contemplated how to take these philosophical ideologies and apply them to an action plan. The discussions in the Harlem Ashram had lasting effects not only on the future of the Fellowship, but also on race conditions in the United States. As Smiley noted, “It was a tiny pebble thrown into a pond, but its resulting ripples and waves were to have an extraordinary influence upon the future of civil rights activism in America.”<sup>23</sup>

The Harlem Ashram was a mecca for people to discuss principles and establish new organizations like the Committee for Non-Violent Direct Action and the Free India Committee. These two organizations revealed the Fellowship’s devotion to not only its antiwar platform, but also its growing commitment to the struggle for black equality in the United States. Since the Fellowship of Reconciliation had committed itself in the 1930’s to conscientious objection, pacifism, the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha, global peace, and racial equity, one might wonder why there was a need to establish the Congress of Racial Equality in 1942. The intent of the Fellowship was to focus on correcting social and global issues that morally corrupted the world. In order to achieve the goals A.J. Muste believed there was a need for a revolutionary approach to the struggle. A.J. Muste envisioned an organization that adopted a more aggressive platform that would transform society. As Muste stated, “in a world built on violence, one must be a revolutionary before one can be a pacifist... a non-revolutionary pacifist is a contradiction in terms, a monstrosity.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, Troubles, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, Troubles, 70.

<sup>24</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 40.

As the 1940's began, Muste focused on achieving social justice at home, through a massive nonviolent movement, as well as an, resistance to war.

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was the product. Abraham Johannes Muste expressed his beliefs and leadership during World War II. He vehemently wanted to expand the agenda of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to confront racial problems in the United States. Muste wanted to establish a more aggressive organization, in which the "...only valid objective [was] the transformation of society, not the building of a shelter for its saints."<sup>25</sup> By 1941, Muste wanted to create a revolutionary movement that encompassed more than resistance to war, but contributed to establishing an interracial and equal society in the United States. The road to this revolutionary agenda was not an easy one.

While Muste envisioned a revolutionary movement that went beyond the scope of global war, the majority of the National Council of the Fellowship of Reconciliation was immensely cautious and advocated against such a drastic change in philosophy and direction. "On social activism," as D'Emilio noted, "they [the national council] were conservative. They did agree that they would not participate in war, and that was the only cement."<sup>26</sup> The suggestion of a racial revolution at home made the comfortable lives of these middle class Americans far more complex. Muste wanted The National Council of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to adhere fully to its convictions. As Muste declared, "Either we ought to resign from the world... or else we must resolutely carry our political

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<sup>25</sup> D'Emilio, Lost Prophet,40.

<sup>26</sup> D'Emilio, Lost Prophet,43.

task to its end.”<sup>27</sup> Muste implored the members of the council to take action against the internal injustices in the United States. These men and women wanted to avoid conflict and maintain a sense of peace and tranquility, but as Gregory Vlastos, a theologian stated, “He who preaches love in a society based upon injustice can purchase immunity from conflict only at the price of hypocrisy.”<sup>28</sup> In not pursuing this new direction, the Fellowship of Reconciliation was condoning the oppression of the African American race in the United States. As D’Emilio noted, “the Christian pacifists of the FOR sought to end war, [while members of the race relation cells] wished to eliminate injustice.”<sup>29</sup>

Muste began the process of expanding the Fellowship of Reconciliation by establishing “race relation cells.” These activists that had the same fervor for combating racial inequality as Muste. These young men and women had a “lean and hungry look,” needed to create change in the country.<sup>30</sup>

James Farmer was one of the first activists to work with these cells. Farmer understood from an early age the evils of racial segregation and discrimination. Growing up in Mississippi, Farmer endured racial slurs, and he witnessed the humiliation of his father at the hands of white southerners. He questioned why a segment of white society reduced blacks to second-class citizenship in the United States. Muste wanted a revolution, and Farmer gave him the pathway to achieve that goal. In April 1942 Farmer, along with George Houser, Bernice Fisher, Homer Jack, James Robinson, and Joe Guinn, took steps to establish the Chicago Committee of Racial Equality under the auspices of

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<sup>27</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 103.

<sup>29</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 50.

<sup>30</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 43.

FOR.<sup>31</sup> They proposed to the Fellowship of Reconciliation a nationwide “distinctive and radical”<sup>32</sup> interracial movement that embraced Gandhian principles of nonviolence, and that would employ these principles in the struggle to end racial segregation, discrimination, and inequality. Farmer envisioned this organization going beyond an anti-war grouping. “Peace,” Farmer recalled later, “was number one for [Muste], whereas for me the priority was racial equality.”<sup>33</sup> Farmer proposed an organization engaged in “nonviolent direct action protests and sit-ins, if necessary, to combat racial segregation and discrimination.”<sup>34</sup> He wanted a “movement comprised of a pacifist nucleus: black, white, Jewish and Gentile, all mobilized into a Gandhian approach to integration.”<sup>35</sup> The goals were monumental: “Not to make housing in ghettos more tolerable, but to destroy residential segregation; not to make Jim Crow facilities the equal to others, but to abolish Jim Crow; not to make racial discrimination more bearable, but to wipe it out”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The National Council of the Fellowship of Reconciliation granted Farmer and his other comrades the opportunity to establish the Congress of Racial Equality on a test basis in Chicago. While the council went forward with subsidizing the CORE, the cautious nature of the council made it leery of supporting the organization outright.

<sup>32</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, Troubles, 93.

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, Troubles, 93.

<sup>35</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 89.

<sup>36</sup> James Farmer, “Provisional Plans for Brotherhood Mobilization,” 2/19/42, and “Supplemental Memorandum to Brotherhood Mobilization,” n.d., reprinted in Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 355-60.

These men and one woman wanted to establish a course of action that, according to Darlene Clark Hine, made “America live up to the ideals of equality and justice.”<sup>37</sup>

Farmer reflected the same sentiment; in his memoir *Lay Bare the Heart*, he wrote,

As we swept by the pregnant earth of Ohio farms on that spring day in 1942, there was already talk about our giving birth that year to a revolution in race relations with a technique new to America that would change the face of this nation. The Blessed Community and the Family of Christ are rent asunder by the evil practice of apartheid in America, which will not end until the decent and the religious people of the land will it so. God willing, segregation will end when the good people withdraw their cooperation from it and stop, willingly or unwillingly, giving it their support. What I am proposing is that the FOR, because of its thorough-going commitment to nonviolence and brotherhood, take the lead in setting up a vehicle through which no cooperation with evil can be forged into a national movement.<sup>38</sup>

These six members of the FOR race relations peace team set into motion an uncompromising agenda that displayed their deep-rooted beliefs in integration and pacifism. They reflected a new generation of pacifists that no longer drew their inspiration from Henry Hodgkin and Friedrich Sigmund Schulze—which later was a point of contention between A.J. Muste and CORE founders—but rather used “Gandhian nonviolence to [attack] racism in the United States.”<sup>39</sup> George Houser echoed this new challenge in the FOR pacifism, writing in 1945:

Since two-thirds of all the peoples of the world are colored, if racial democracy is not realized there is not much hope of creating permanently much of any other kind of democracy in the world. And racial democracy must consist in unequivocal recognition of equality among human beings regardless of race,

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<sup>37</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, *The African American Odyssey*, (Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey), 495

<sup>38</sup> Farmer, *Lay Bare*, 102.

<sup>39</sup> D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 50.

color, religion, national origin, or ancestry, in our social relations, government, industry, labor, law, and education. People do not have to be all of the same color, religion, height, or weight, or with long, round, or square heads in order that their personalities may be considered of equal human worth and dignity.<sup>40</sup>

Pacifism remained the preached message of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, but a new national movement was emerging out of the FOR, one that advocated fighting nonviolently for real democracy and racial equality.

CORE envisioned a transformed United States where men and women of diverse cultures came together to establish harmony in a nation clearly divided along social, political, cultural, and racial lines. The current lack of harmony affected not only the people of the nation, but the nation itself. In order for America to be true to its ideals, it first had to recognize its weaknesses and eliminate them. The Congress of Racial Equality argued divisions within the country, like the lack of “organic unity of the human family,”<sup>41</sup> was a destructive weakness in the United States. The American people needed to acknowledge that the reality of the African American’s economic, political and social experience in the United States tarnished the American creed of human equality.<sup>42</sup>

CORE desired to uphold this American creed, which Gunnar Myrdal had described in *An American Dilemma* as:

These ideals of the essential dignity of the individual human being, of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and fair opportunity ....these tenets were written into the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and into the

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<sup>40</sup> George Houser, “Erasing the Color Line,” (1945) 7

<sup>41</sup> Houser, “Erasing” 7.

<sup>42</sup> Inge Powell Bell, Core and the Strategy of Nonviolence, (Random House: New York, 1968), 29.



constitutions of the several states. The ideals of the American Creed have thus become the highest law of the land.<sup>43</sup>

CORE wanted everyone in this country to have equal access to the “highest law of the land.

“African Americans,” according to the historian John D’Emilio, “had been resisting racial oppression, [and fighting for the American creed], for generations.”<sup>44</sup>

CORE, though, explored new territory with its mindset of nonviolent direct action.

CORE took the movement to the streets and provided a national voice for nonviolent resistance. The nonviolent resistance of CORE became a way of life, not just a formal policy, for men and women in this country to forge human relationships based upon equality.<sup>46</sup>

CORE became the focal point of the nonviolent direct action society in 1942 with the subsidizing support of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, but the question remained, how do you take an ideology and make it a reality? What was the viability of protests, sit-ins, stand-ins, and jail-ins? What was going to ensure this organization’s success in achieving its goal of racial harmony? Passion was not lacking, but to provide momentum for CORE in 1942, there had to be an action plan. The action plan devised by CORE defined the relationship between CORE and the philosophy of nonviolence. James Farmer and his comrades characterized nonviolence as a “powerful social force that

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<sup>43</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, (McGraw-Hill: New York, 1964) 4.

<sup>44</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 54.

<sup>45</sup> Blacks resisted racial oppression in the courtrooms and through legislation for generations. CORE’s approach took the fight into the communities.

<sup>46</sup> D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 54.

highlighted three major points: (1) the power of active good will and no retaliation; (2) the power of public opinion against an injustice; (3) the power of refusing to be a party to injustice, as illustrated by the boycott and strike.”<sup>47</sup>

CORE took these three points and created a platform to change the social constructs in the United States. CORE’s belief was that nonviolent action could resolve the racial problems of the country. CORE’s founders and new members embraced the notion that a “spirit of good will, [respect] and understanding contributed to ending discrimination and [fostering] an integrated society where each member [was] judged solely on the basis of his individual worth.”<sup>48</sup>

In order for CORE’s nonviolent direct action plan to work, the organization needed a one hundred percent commitment to the Gandhian principle of Satyagraha. Martin Luther King Jr., wrote of this commitment in Stride Toward Freedom. King noted,

Bomb our homes and threaten our children; send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities and drag us out on some wayside road, beating us and leaving us half dead, and we will still love you. But we will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process.<sup>49</sup>

The “race relations” team of James Farmer, Bernice Fisher, Jimmy Robinson, Joe Guinn, Homer Jack, Bob Chino and Hugo Victoreen wasted no time in challenging racial segregation through non-violent direct action. As Farmer noted in Lay Bare the Heart,

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<sup>47</sup> Bell, CORE, 195.

<sup>48</sup> Bell, CORE, 195.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Luther King, Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story, (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 217.

“May 1942, we began what I believe to be the first organized civil rights sit-in in American history.”<sup>50</sup> Chicago CORE launched its first campaign to eliminate discriminatory practices at Jack Spratt Coffee House. In an earlier visit, Farmer and Robinson, a white graduate student at the University of Chicago, faced blatant discrimination. Farmer recalled the manager’s reaction to him and Robinson coming into the restaurant. “You’ll have to get out of here,” the owner said, “We can’t serve you here.” Farmer, bewildered by the comment, responded simply, “Why can’t you?” Not waiting for an answer, Robinson pointed out to the restaurant manager that he was in violation of state law. Robinson stated, “I suppose you realize that there is a civil rights law in this state forbidding this kind of practice. Now, if you don’t serve us, I promise that you’re going to pay the stiffest penalty that the law allows.”<sup>51</sup>

While Robinson’s words were more aggressive than the traditional Gandhian method, they were effective. The manager responded by taking both his and Farmer’s order. The discrimination did not end with this exchange of words. The manager tried to overcharge Farmer for a cup of coffee and two donuts. Claiming the donuts were a dollar a piece, Farmer replied, “that is rather steep for donuts, don’t you think?” Robinson interceded and said, “I’ve gotten donuts here at two for a nickel and that’s the price we’re going to pay.”<sup>52</sup> After Jim Robinson paid one dollar for both the coffees and two donuts, he and Farmer left the Jack Spratt coffeehouse.

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<sup>50</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 106.

<sup>51</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 91.

This experience ignited the spark for CORE's first action plan to end the discriminatory practices in public facilities. Within forty-eight hours Farmer, Robinson, Joe Guinn, a black youth in the community, Winnie Christie, Farmer's first wife, Bernice Fisher, one of the initial founders and members of CORE, and a handful of white students returned to Jack Spratt Coffeehouse to start a non-violent direct action protest.

Robinson and Fisher trained these men and women in Gandhian nonviolent direct action. Their structured action plan included four major components. The first component was:

1. Preparation: Knowing the types of discrimination facing your group
  - a. Refusal of service
  - b. Being seated reluctantly and in an obscure place
  - c. Being forcibly ejected
  - d. Discrimination in food—irregular food—garbage sandwiches and or small portions
  - e. Overcharging
2. Secondly, CORE instituted ways to counter act this discrimination
  - a. Stage a small sit-down. Ask for the manager or someone responsible for the policy
  - b. Sometimes one may request another seat, although this is not advisable if establishing a court case.
  - c. Stand your ground, accept violence if necessary and do not retort nor respond violently.
  - d. Ask to see the manager or someone responsible. If establishing a court case, take a sample of the food.
  - e. Call attention to the fact of overcharging, but pay your bill, as refusal might prejudice your position.
3. Thirdly, CORE encouraged follow up through negotiation.
  - a. Whenever service is refused or is very poor, there should be a follow-up. Careful planning is helpful before anything is done. The first step is negotiation which must be carried on by personal contact, by a designated committee, which should be interracial.
  - b. When repeated negotiations fail, more direct action can be taken, such as passing out leaflets, picketing, talking to patrons, sit-down strikes, etc.
  - c. Always ask what possible approach to an understanding has not yet been tried.

- d. If all efforts at negotiation and arbitration have no effect in changing the policy of the restaurant, it may be necessary to appeal to the law, but this should be done only when all other efforts have failed.
- 4. Finally, CORE offered helpful hints for a positive outcome.
  - a. Be confident, and assume that you will have trouble being served.
  - b. Dress neatly and appropriately
  - c. Tip your waitress
  - d. Always pay your bill
  - e. Be observant at all times. Watch particularly the reactions of customers and capitalize on sympathetic responses.
  - f. If no difficulty is encountered, you may express appreciation for courteous service to the cashier.<sup>53</sup>

Robinson and Fisher stressed the need for everyone to be peaceful and orderly, never loud or verbally abusive. Unruly behavior was unacceptable; rather a calm friendly disposition was the attitude they wanted the protesters to exhibit. As Farmer recalled:

We were to take available seats at the counter, with each white sitting beside at least one black. If there were not enough counter seats, then also use one booth, with at least one black and one white sitting there. Whites were either to decline to order until all had been served, or to order and pass the food to a black friend beside them. If we were served, each person was to leave an appropriate tip and give enough money to Jimmy Robinson to cover the bill. He would pay the bill for all of us and give us an accounting afterward. In the event we were not served, we would sit there for the approximately three and a half hours till closing.<sup>54</sup>

Following this briefing, the group entered Jack Spratt Coffeehouse and took seats at the counter. Standing motionless and with his arms folded, the manager did not greet or serve the group. Bernice responded first, “May we have some service please?”<sup>55</sup> Reluctantly, the manager signaled the server to take everyone’s order. Without any climatic incidents,

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<sup>53</sup> CORE Archives, CORE sit-in literature, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>54</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 92.

the diners finished their meals. It was, as Farmer noted rather “anticlimactic.” The manager and his staff had complied with the Illinois law, which Robinson mentioned in his and Farmer’s visit. The men and women left their payments on the counter where all their checks were stacked and left the coffeehouse. The Jack Spratt Coffeehouse was not going to put up a fight, or so Farmer and his comrades thought. But, Farmer recalled:

Scarcely had the door closed behind the rest of us than it opened again, violently this time. The manager ran onto the sidewalk, hurling our money into the street, screaming, ‘take your money and get out! We don’t want it!’ Dollar bills fluttered and coins rolled. One person started to pick it up, but I said, No. Don’t touch it; leave it there so he can’t possibly say that we left without paying our bill.<sup>56</sup>

The actions of the manager set in motion Chicago CORE’s nonviolent direct action plan to break Jim Crow practices on the South side of Chicago. The group focused its action on three basic steps, (1) investigation—to understand the facts, (2) negotiation—to engage in face-to-face discussion to solve the problem, and (3) direct action—if discussion proved unsuccessful.

The non-violent direct action campaign against Jack Spratt started with a phone call to set up a negotiation session to discuss the discriminatory practices of the coffeehouse. When Farmer identified himself, the manager hung up. In response, Farmer drafted a letter asking for a meeting to discuss the situation. He requested that the manager respond by phone or letter within ten days. When the manager did not respond by the deadline, Farmer, Jimmy, and Bernice decided to send two female students—one white—one black—to Jack Spratt to open up dialogue with the manager. Farmer thought the manager “would be more receptive and civil to women.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 93.

<sup>57</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 105.

When the women arrived, they met a woman, identified later as the owner, who agreed to discuss the situation. The woman, who indicated that she was only following the policy “dictated by the requirements of business,” said that she feared losing her white patrons if she served blacks at her establishment.<sup>58</sup> The CORE team replied that her business was close enough to the university to offset any potential losses. When the woman disagreed, the CORE representatives asked permission to query the present customers to ascertain whether they would object to Jack Spratt Coffeehouse serving blacks. The woman refused. Determined to prove their point, the CORE team requested that a bookkeeper or CPA look over the books after one month of the coffeehouse serving all patrons. If there was a loss, the CORE team said they would pay the deficit for that month and end the direct action campaign at Jack Spratt. The woman swiftly turned down the offer and walked away, thus ending the negotiation.

The night of May 12, 1942, Chicago CORE decided to carry out a large-scale sit-in at Jack Spratt Coffeehouse on May 15, 1942. White and black men and women planned to occupy all available seats in the coffeehouse. Meeting at 4:30, they began what Farmer believed was “the first organized civil rights sit-in in American history.”<sup>59</sup> Consisting of twenty-eight persons, the group entered Jack Spratt in pairs of two, three, and four, with each party having one black woman or man. Filling every available counter and booth, the parties waited for a server to serve them. The staff looked to the owner, who had cut off negotiation, whether to serve the parties. The staff, who had

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<sup>58</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 105.

<sup>59</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 106.

proceeded to serve the customers not involved with the sit-in, were shocked when these customers refused to eat their food and joined the protest. The owner asked one woman:

Is your dinner all right, ma'am?

Oh, I'm sure it's just fine.

But you aren't eating it.

I know. You see it wouldn't be very polite of me to begin eating before my friends also had been served.<sup>60</sup>

Other patrons followed suit, they either refused service or ate their meals slowly, becoming a part of the protest. At this point, the owner approached Jimmy Robinson and offered to seat all the black patrons and serve them in the basement. Farmer responded, "No ma'am. We will not eat in the basement." The owner suggested, "If you clear out the two rear booths, then all the colored people can sit there, and I will have them served." Again, Farmer politely declined with a "No thank you; we are quite comfortable where we are."<sup>61</sup>

Growing frustrated with the situation, the owner threatened to call the police. Farmer responded, "That might be the appropriate thing for her to do."<sup>62</sup>

When the police arrived, they witnessed no one disturbing the peace and asked the owner why she called the police? She replied, "I want you to throw these people out."<sup>63</sup> The police stressed they could not throw people out of an establishment if they were not in violation of any law. The police officers informed the women, that those sitting in her

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<sup>60</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 106.

<sup>61</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 107.

<sup>62</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 107.

<sup>63</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 107.



establishment were not trespassing because she was open for business, and they were not causing a riot, thus the police had no justification to remove them from Jack Spratt. Not pleased with the officers' response, the owner said, "well now, won't you throw them out on the grounds that we reserve the right to seat our patrons and would serve some of them in the basement."<sup>64</sup> Growing annoyed with the woman, a police officer said, "No lady, there's nothing in the law that allows us to do that. You must either serve them or solve the problem yourself the best way you can."<sup>65</sup> As the police left the Jack Spratt coffeehouse, the owner ordered the servers to serve all the parties in the protest.

The first nonviolent direct action protest ended with the groups eating their meals, paying their bills, leaving good tips, and leaving the Jack Spratt establishment hoping that a permanent change in policy was in place. Jimmy Robinson later wrote a letter to Jack Spratt to thank the restaurant for its service and change in policy. The Chicago CORE chapter, in subsequent protests, did witness the policy change.<sup>66</sup>

The sit-in protest at Jack Spratt reflected CORE's determination to move the country toward equality. CORE's approach was action oriented and focused. Unlike the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, CORE believed direct action, not legal action, was the solution for blacks in the United States. They wanted people and communities to choose integration and eliminate racism on their own, not

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<sup>64</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 107.

<sup>65</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 107.

<sup>66</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 107.

because a court ordered it. These men and women envisioned a society that “challenged [discrimination] directly, without violence or hatred, yet without compromise.”<sup>67</sup>

For the Chicago CORE chapter, the battle between racial segregation and racial harmony continued in June of 1943. While the sit-in protest at Jack Spratt was successful, other establishments in Chicago continued their discriminatory practices. Stoner’s restaurant, a local business in Chicago’s loop district, openly discriminated against black and racially mixed groups that tried to integrate the restaurant. Known for its good food, Stoner’s restaurant was crowded daily with customers waiting in lines for empty tables. George Houser took the lead with this direct action protest. After several test visits in 1942 to Stoner’s establishment, he concluded that management was extremely hostile to any type of integration. This mentality did not deter Houser and Chicago CORE, but rather it increased their determination to end the practice of restaurants not serving blacks.

Houser sent two white females to Stoner’s restaurant to begin negotiations. The negotiations started with one question: why did Stoner pursue these practices? Stoner replied:

I would lose all [my] white trade if colored people came to [my] restaurant.... 90 percent of [my] trade [is] from women and they would not want to eat beside Negroes, [and] if the two races ate in the same restaurant it would lead to interracial marriage....<sup>68</sup>

Stoner denied any responsibility for his discriminatory practices. Houser and Chicago CORE responded with sit-in protests. Stoner stayed true to his policy and

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<sup>67</sup> August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, “How CORE Began,” *Social Science Quarterly*, (March 1969) 791.

<sup>68</sup> Houser, “Erasing,” 21.

refused service to the black and racially mixed groups. Houser and Chicago CORE responded by handing out leaflets encouraging people not to support an establishment that discriminated on the basis of race. Feeling the economic pinch of the protest, Stoner began to seat and serve the black and racially-mixed protest groups, but in other ways deep-rooted discrimination persisted. After lengthy waits, the servers seated these protest groups, and, once seated, they received inedible meals made from garbage and smothered in spices, like salt.

Stoner felt persecuted by the CORE protest. “Why pick on [me]?” he asked, “Don’t other restaurants discriminate as well?”<sup>69</sup> Houser and Chicago CORE responded by investigating the “policies of all eating establishments within an area of sixteen square blocks in the loop.”<sup>70</sup> The investigation revealed all the restaurants within the sixteen-block radius of the 50 loop had non-discriminatory practices and served all patrons.

Chicago’s CORE members turned its attention to executing a large-scale sit-down at Stoner’s restaurant in June 1943 after they had exhausted all measures to persuade Stoner to change his policy. Sixty-five persons (sixteen blacks—forty-nine whites) pledged to remain in Stoner’s restaurant, whether seated or standing, all night long, until all sixty-five persons had been served. At 4:30 on a Saturday afternoon, white participants in twos, threes, and fours entered Stoner’s restaurant. The servers found no difficulty seating all these white participants. The first interracial group did not experience the same welcome when it entered the restaurant at 5:15 PM. Stoner’s staff

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<sup>69</sup> Houser, “Erasing,” 22.

<sup>70</sup> Houser, “Erasing,” 21.

ignored and refused to serve the group, while other patrons received service.<sup>71</sup> The group remained, standing quietly at the entrance of the restaurant, until a server, pressured by white patrons, not with the CORE groups, motioned them to a booth. Stoner, not pleased with this action, kicked one of the white participants in the leg when he sat down at the booth.

With the seating of this group, a third group of ten CORE members (nine blacks-one white) entered and requested service. For the next hour and a half, the group of ten persons stood patiently at the front of the restaurant. Stoner called the police on numerous occasions, hoping for the police to remove the protest groups. The authorities, having no grounds to remove the groups, were curious about what was taking place; and they told Stoner that there was, “nothing they could do, for the interracial group was far from causing a disturbance.”<sup>72</sup>

The sit-down protest attracted positive attention from the patrons in Stoner’s restaurant. Many white patrons and Stoner’s employees expressed sympathy for the agenda of CORE and its protest. Servers and black bus persons whispered sentiments like, “Keep it up; we’re all with you,” [and] “[I] plan to quit my job if you are not seated.”<sup>73</sup> Eventually, an elderly white woman invited one of the black female protesters to sit at her table because she was appalled that “there were restaurants in Chicago that did not serve blacks.”<sup>74</sup> Several patrons thought these practices took place “down South,

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<sup>71</sup> This first interracial group consisted of six blacks and two whites.

<sup>72</sup> Houser, “Erasing,” 23.

<sup>73</sup> Houser, “Erasing,” 24.

<sup>74</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 114.

but not here.”<sup>75</sup> Following suit, other diners began to invite these CORE members to their tables, and when only two protesters remained, a server seated them. Applause accompanied the seating of the last two CORE members, Farmer recalled, “ The black busgirls beamed [and] an old gray-haired lady, eyes blazing, looked up into my face as we passed by and shouted, Bravo!”<sup>76</sup> The outcome at Stoner’s restaurant, Farmer added, was a “fitting climax to a well-organized executed non-violent demonstration for racial justice.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 114.

<sup>76</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 114.

<sup>77</sup> Houser, “Erasing,” 24.

RECONCILING THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION: THE REVEALING OF  
THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

1947

Irene Morgan-Kirkaldy was simply tired the day she refused to give up her seat to a white patron on a Greyhound bus. Traveling from Virginia to Baltimore, Morgan-Kirkaldy abided by all the state statutes as she sat in the segregated section of the bus. When a white couple boarded the crowded bus, Morgan Kirkaldy was told to give her seat to the white patrons. Morgan refused and sparked a new defiance of racism, that of a freedom fighter.

Morgan-Kirkaldy was forcibly removed from the bus by police officers and arrested for violating the state statute that stipulated segregation of the races on public vehicles. She went to jail, but refused to pay the \$100 fine for "defying Virginia's Jim Crow laws." <sup>78</sup> She admitted to her guilt for resisting arrest, but fought against the charge of violating segregation laws. This fight manifested itself into the Supreme Court case of Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia.

Morgan-Kirkaldy's first attorney, a civil rights lawyer in Richmond, argued not in opposition to the principle of segregation on bus travel within Virginia, but rather against segregation on buses traveling from Virginia to other states. The core of his argument was that this type of segregation hindered interstate commerce. Morgan and her attorney lost the case, but won an appeal to the US Supreme Court. In 1946, Thurgood Marshall, William Hastie, and Leon Ransom argued Morgan-Kirkaldy's case before the Supreme Court. These NAACP attorneys used to their advantage the nation's disdain for

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<sup>78</sup>"Fighting Jim Crow Before Rosa Parks," "News & Notes with Ed Gordon," (August 15, 2007), OneFile: <http://galegroup.com>. (accessed 4-18-2011)

“Fascism” and “Nazism” when they argued how hypocritical it was for this nation to “sanction racial oppression at home, when it just emerged victorious in its death struggle against the apostles of racism.”<sup>79</sup>

Justice Reed of Kentucky, in response to the NAACP’s argument, stated that “segregation imposes an undue burden on interstate commerce,” since “it is too much trouble to have bus riders changing seats as buses roll from one state to another.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Supreme Court of the United States found racial segregation on buses and trains unconstitutional because of the hassle to enforce, and not the blatant discrimination it fostered.<sup>81</sup>

A decade before Rosa Parks refusal to give up her seat on a bus sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Morgan-Kirkaldy’s actions launched the era of the freedom rider. She never labeled herself an activist, but she influenced one of the largest active protests against segregation in this country. The “Journey of Reconciliation” found its protest roots within the Morgan decision of 1946.

As August Meier and Elliot Rudwick have written in CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968, the Journey of Reconciliation “demonstrated the inherent limitations of legalism, and provided an excellent opportunity to prove the value of

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<sup>79</sup>Leon A. Higginbotham, Jr., “45 years in law and civil rights; many of the greatest battles in the war on discrimination were waged in court,” Ebony. 46. (November 1990), 80.

<sup>80</sup> “Question Ducked,” Time, 47(June 10, 1946), 25.

<sup>81</sup> The case of Matthew v. Southern Railway ruled that there was no valid difference between buses and railway cars, thus segregation was deemed unconstitutional within both of these venues.

nonviolent direct action.”<sup>82</sup> The Supreme Court handed down a social altering decision, but compliance to that decision proved challenging. The prospect of integration on buses and trains faded with the increase in violent reaction towards blacks who challenged Jim Crow.

The most alarming incident involved the beating of Isaac Woodward in February 1946. Woodward, a veteran returning home from a Georgia military base on a Greyhound bus, was arrested in Batesburg, South Carolina, after having a verbal disagreement with the bus driver over “racial etiquette.”<sup>83</sup> Chief of Police Linwood Shull, along with a deputy, pulled Woodward from the bus and began beating him. When they finished, Woodward was blind in both eyes. Raymond Arsenault, author of Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice, wrote that Woodward “survived fifteen months fighting the Japanese in the Pacific to only run afoul of two white men who saw fit to gouge out his eyes with the blunt end of a billy club.”<sup>84</sup> The egregious actions of Shull and his deputy prompted a FBI investigation and indictment in 1946, but to no avail; an all-white jury in Columbia, South Carolina, came back with a not guilty verdict, even with sworn testimony from army doctors about Woodward’s beating.

Wilson Head, a World War II veteran, also tested the compliance of the Morgan decision in July 1946. Traveling from Atlanta to Washington on the Greyhound line, Head encountered threats from hostile drivers, passengers, and police officers.

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<sup>82</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, Core: A Study in the Civil Right Movement, 1942-1968, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 34.

<sup>83</sup> Raymond Arsenault, Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice. (New York:Oxford University Press, 2006), 34.

<sup>84</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 34.



Maintaining a nonviolent approach, Head arrived in Washington unharmed and proved that while by no means safe, compliance with the Morgan decision was attainable. His positive experience acted as a stepping stone for the Congress of Racial Equality to set out and test the Morgan decision in other Jim Crow states. This Journey, as August Meier and Elliot Rudwick noted in CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement was the first “real national campaign... a project that would provide CORE with a national image and arouse the energy of the many local chapters....”<sup>85 86</sup>

Bayard Rustin and George Houser started the initial discussions of the Journey of Reconciliation in the summer of 1946. Both men envisioned a trip from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Louisiana, with the goal of national strategy and movement as the focal point of the Journey. The Journey was “an entering wedge for CORE into the South.”<sup>87</sup> This wedge into the South was important because of the lack of CORE chapters in that region. As Houser noted, “... it wasn’t easy to organize them at this point, especially with the two words ‘racial equality’ in our name. But with a definite project around which to rally, we felt there was a possibility of opening up an area seemingly out of reach.”<sup>88</sup>

Rustin and Houser were convinced that Jim Crow discrimination on the buses was the perfect target for National CORE to strike at, for as Houser explained it, “touched

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<sup>85</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 34.

<sup>86</sup> The Congress of Racial Equality became, by 1946, known for its local affiliate chapters and their projects. The Journey acted as an introduction of National CORE to the Civil Rights Movement. The hope was for the Journey to increase financial donations to the organization, so other CORE chapters could start and the executive staff could grow.

<sup>87</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 33.

<sup>88</sup> Houser, “A Personal Retrospective,” 3-4 quoted in; Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 34.

virtually every black person, and was demeaning in its effect and a source of frequent conflict.”<sup>89</sup>

By mid-September when the executive committee arrived in Cleveland, Rustin and Houser had a plan prepared for the Journey. Taking into consideration the dangers of challenging Jim Crow in the South, Rustin and Houser secured the support of the executive committee of CORE and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), making the Journey a joint venture. Rustin and Houser worked with FOR’s Racial-Industrial Department over the next few months to finalize the project, adding a training session component and restricting the Journey to the Upper South. While Rustin and Houser felt penetrating the Deep South would have a greater impact, they heeded the warnings of their southern contacts who stressed that “an interracial journey through the deep South would provoke wholesale violence.”<sup>90</sup> Penetrating the Deep South, according to James Peck, one of the participants, would “simply have meant immediate arrest of all participants, an end to the trip—and possibly of us.”<sup>91</sup> The purpose of the Journey was to influence “the masses of people, both Negro and white, to renounce Jim Crow traveling in accordance with the decision of our highest court.”<sup>92</sup>

In preparation for the journey, the FOR’s Racial-Industrial Department also suggested that a series of nonviolent-themed lectures should take place in the cities in

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<sup>89</sup>Houser, “A Personal Retrospective,” in Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 34.

<sup>90</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 35.

<sup>91</sup> George Houser and Bayard Rustin, “Memo on Bus Travel in the South” (n.d., attached to Houser to Dear Friend, November 4, 1946; James Peck, Freedom Ride, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 16, quoted in August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, “The First Freedom Ride,” Phylon, 30. (3rd Qtr. 1969), 215.

<sup>92</sup> Peck, Freedom Ride, 16, quoted in Meier and Rudwick, “The First Freedom Ride,” Phylon, 215.

order to give “some purpose to the trip outside of simple tests and experimentation.”<sup>93</sup>

According to Meier and Rudwick, the rationale behind having these lectures was to teach black and white southerners the benefits of using the nonviolent direct action platform for “when Negroes spontaneously begin to resist illegal Jim Crow practices in the South, violence will certainly take place on a wide scale unless some group [these black and white southerners] dedicated to nonviolence evolves a pattern in which both resistance and reconciliation are possible.”<sup>94</sup> While the main goal was to test compliance, CORE and the Fellowship wanted to spread their philosophy of nonviolent direct action in the South. The two organizations also decided that all the participants be male—a decision that the women of CORE felt was paternalistic—perceiving that the mixture of race and sex “would possibly exacerbate an already volatile situation.”<sup>95</sup>

CORE chapters began to spread the news of the pending journey into the South among fellow Civil Rights organizations, and they received endorsements and support from notable black leaders—A. Philip Randolph, Howard Thurman, and Mary McLeod Bethune. The National Association for the Advancement of Color People (NAACP), however, refused to actively support CORE and the journey. Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP’s chief counsel, was the first to voice his disapproval of CORE’s national campaign. Speaking at an NAACP Youth conference in November of 1946, Marshall criticized the pending actions of the Journey and warned the crowd against “well

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<sup>93</sup> Houser, “A Personal Retrospective,” in Arsenault, Freedom Riders: 35.

<sup>94</sup> Meier and Rudwick, “The First Freedom Ride,” 215.

<sup>95</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 35.

meaning radical groups in New York.”<sup>96</sup> While never mentioning CORE or FOR directly Marshall predicted that “a disobedience movement on the part of Negroes and their white allies, if employed in the South, would result in wholesale slaughter with no good achieved.”<sup>97</sup> Marshall took a more personal approach when he said, “you know Rustin, you are insane to try this, just dumb.”<sup>98</sup> After reading Marshall’s stern criticism in the *New York Times* Houser, Rustin, and A.J. Muste, head of the FOR, understood that it was “more imperative that we think through our campaign properly.”<sup>99</sup> Houser, Rustin, and Muste knew that arrests of the participants were inevitable and they would need the assistance of the NAACP’s attorneys during the Journey. Thus it was important that CORE and FOR have the support of the NAACP. Their response published in the Louisiana Weekly in January 1947, and written by Rustin, stressed CORE and FOR’s firm commitment to nonviolent direct action and to the Journey of Reconciliation. Rustin wrote,

I am sure that Marshall is either ill-informed on the principles and techniques of non-violence or ignorant of the processes of social change. Unjust social laws and patterns do not change because supreme courts deliver opinions. One need merely observe the continued practices of Jim Crow in interstate travel six months after the Supreme Court’s decision to see the necessity of resistance. Social progress comes from struggle; all freedom demands a price.

At times freedom will demand that its followers go into situations where even death is to be faced.... Direct action means picketing, striking, and boycotting as well as disobedience against unjust conditions, and all of these methods have already been used with some success by Negroes and sympathetic whites....

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<sup>96</sup> Meier and Rudwick, “The First Freedom Ride,” 216.

<sup>97</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 36.

<sup>98</sup> John D ‘Emilio, Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 134.

<sup>99</sup> Meier and Rudwick, “The First Freedom Ride,” 216.

I cannot believe that Thurgood Marshall thinks that such a program would lead to wholesale slaughter.... But if anyone at this date in history believes that the “white problem,” which is one of privilege, can be settled without some violence, he is mistaken and fails to realize the ends to which man can be driven to hold on to what they consider privileges.

This is why Negroes and whites who participate in direct action must pledge themselves to non-violence in word and deed. For in this way alone can the inevitable violence be reduced to a minimum? The simple truth is this: unless we find non-violent methods which can be used by the rank-and-file who more and more tend to resist, they will more and more resort to violence. And court-room argumentation will not suffice for the activation which the Negro masses are today demanding.<sup>100</sup>

Rustin’s stern and direct tone did not change Marshall’s stance against the campaign, but NAACP leaders like executive secretary Walter White and Roy Wilkins, editor of The Crisis, understood that CORE and its participants in the Journey were moving ahead with the ride, and they looked upon the Journey as an opportunity to invigorate NAACP chapters in the South.

Rustin and Houser believed that the racial climate in the country was coming to a boiling point. The time was right to put into action a campaign that had the potential to evoke substantive change in the country. The Journey of Reconciliation began on April 9; just four months after Harry Truman had created the President’s Commission on Civil Rights. The movement was perfect to showcase nonviolent direct action in the movement to establish racial equity in the United States of America.

In January Houser and Rustin began to prepare for the Journey of Reconciliation. They planned a scouting trip along the route mapped out in the Upper South. They were meticulous in the observance of all the Jim Crow laws in Virginia and North Carolina,

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<sup>100</sup> Bayard Rustin, “Our Guest Column: Beyond the Courts,” *Louisiana Weekly*, January 4, 1947 quoted in Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 37.

thus avoiding any altercation that could lead to arrest. The goal of their reconnaissance was to set up public speaking appearances, rally locations, and housing for the Journey's participants. It was during this trip that Houser and Rustin were made aware of the "other" NAACP: a faction within the organization that admired and supported all the advances court victories brought to the African American community, but who wanted to see the movement take action outside of the courtroom. The Journey for the "other" NAACP represented an action that could take the movement to the next level.

Rustin and Houser next began to put together the 16-member group of Journey participants. This was an elite group of eight white men and eight black men who represented diverse religious and secular backgrounds. The racially-mixed group was comprised of men with white collar jobs, who had completed college, or were completing some level of professional training. In addition to Rustin and Houser, the participants included the following white and black men:

*White participants:*

*James Peck—pacifist and editor of the WDL News Bulletin*

*Homer Jack—a Unitarian minister and pacifist who was one of the founding members of CORE*

*Worth Randle—an active member in CORE and a biologist*

*Igal Roodenko—a peace activist and New York printer*

*Joseph Felmet—a conscientious objector and law student from North Carolina*

*Louis Adams and Ernest Bromley—two Methodist ministers from North Carolina*

*Black participants:*

*Dennis Banks—a jazz musician from Chicago*

*Conrad Lynn—a civil rights attorney from New York*

*Eugene Stanley—an instructor of agronomy at North Carolina A&T College in Greensboro*

*William Worthy—a pacifist with radical journalistic ties to the New York Council for a Permanent FEPC*

*Andrew Johnson—a law student from Ohio*

*Wallace Nelson—a pacifist and conscientious objector*

*Nathan Wright—a social worker from Ohio*<sup>101</sup>



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For many of the sixteen participants this journey marked the first time they would take a national nonviolent direct action campaign into the South. Most of the men were in their twenties, devout pacifists with limited experiences with the Jim Crow South. This level of inexperience Houser and Rustin had to address. Only Rustin, with his unplanned freedom ride in 1942, really knew what to expect on this journey.

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<sup>101</sup>Meier and Rudwick, “The First Freedom Ride,” 217 and Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 38-39.

<sup>102</sup> Ruby Sinreich, Members of the Journey of Reconciliation 1947 in “Chapel Hill Remembers,” (01-30-2008) (<http://forusa.org/ruby-sinreich/chapel-hill-remembers>) accessed 04-18-2011

Rustin experienced firsthand the volatility of southern Jim Crow on a bus trip from Louisville to Nashville in 1946. While riding on the bus, Rustin recalled,

I was wearing a red necktie—it was hot and I had it open and it was dangling—and as I boarded the bus, a woman was sitting with a child on her lap. And the child, as I was jiggling for my ticket and my tie was flying and my bags were going, the child reached over and grabbed my tie and the mother hit it and said, don't touch a nigger.... I had not seen this kind of thing before, so I went back and sat down and I began doodling in the back seat by myself, and I all sudden something began to happen. Next to me was a Negro couple, who had a box with chicken in it and having the best time on earth. And I said, how many years are we going to let that child be misled by its mother—that if we sit in the back and are really having fun, then whites in a way have the right to say they like it in the back.... I vowed then and there I was never going through the South again without either being arrested or thrown off the bus.<sup>103</sup>

Rustin moved to the white section of the bus, refused to sit back in the black section, and calmly told the driver “his conscience would not allow him to obey an unjust law.

Thirteen miles north of Nashville the police met the bus where four officers began to beat Rustin—tossing him back-and-forth, ripping his clothes and causing him to, as he recalled, “shake with nervous strain.”<sup>104</sup> Rustin never broke with his pacifist Gandhian principles of non-violence even when the police captain, shocked by Rustin’s civil disobedience, declared, “Nigger you’re supposed to be scared when you come in here.”<sup>105</sup> Believing Rustin was a “crazy nigger,” the police captain released him and Rustin won a small victory on his first freedom ride.<sup>106</sup>

Using this experience, Rustin and Houser devised an intense training program that addressed the lack of experience of the participants. The orientation of these men

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<sup>103</sup> John D ‘Emilio, Lost Prophet, 46.

<sup>104</sup> John D ‘Emilio, Lost Prophet, 46.

<sup>105</sup> John D ‘Emilio, Lost Prophet, 46.

<sup>106</sup> John D ‘Emilio, Lost Prophet, 47.



included topical seminars and socio-dramas that the men acted out. Many of these same training techniques had been used by FOR peace activists and CORE chapters to understand potential problems when staging nonviolent direct action campaigns. These seminars and socio-dramas taught the men the fundamental principles of nonviolent direct action and how to apply those principles in the face of volatile situations, like “What if the bus driver insulted you? What if you were actually assaulted? What if the police threatened you?” These were very predictable scenarios that could unfold during the journey. The intensity of the training, Jim Peck recalled, “left the riders exhausted but better prepared for the challenges to come.”<sup>107</sup>

The socio-dramas and scenarios were not the only important aspects of the training; also important were the detailed instructions which Rustin and Houser devised and gave to each participant. Safety for all the participants was a primary goal of Rustin and Houser on the Journey. Houser and Rustin devised a training that equipped the men with the necessary physical and mental skills to survive the Journey of Reconciliation. Known later as *You Don't Have to Ride Jim Crow*, this detailed instruction manual emphasized not only how to stay safe while practicing civil disobedience, but also that the Supreme Court's ruling was law. The instruction manual emphasized seven main points:

*WHEN TRAVELING BY BUS WITH A TICKET FROM A POINT IN ONE STATE TO A  
POINT IN ANOTHER STATE*

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<sup>107</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 39.

1. *If a Negro, sit in a front seat. If you are white, sit in a rear seat.*
2. *If a driver asked you to move, tell him calmly and courteously: "As an interstate passenger I have a right to sit anywhere in this bus. This is the law as laid down by the United States Supreme Court."*
3. *If the driver summons the police and repeats his order in their presence, tell him exactly what you told the driver when he first asked you to move.*
4. *If the police ask you to "come along" without putting you under arrest, tell them you will not go until you are put under arrest. Police have often used the tactic of frightening a person into getting off the bus without making an arrest, keeping him until the bus has left and then just leaving him standing by the empty roadside. In such a case this person has no redress.*
5. *If the police put you under arrest, go with them peacefully. At the police station, phone the nearest headquarters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or one of their lawyers. They will assist you.*
6. *If you have money with you, you can get out on bail immediately. It will probably be either \$25 or \$50. If you don't have bail, anti-discrimination organizations will help raise it for you.*
7. *If you are arrested the delay in your journey will only be a few hours. The value of your action in breaking down Jim Crow will be too great to be measured.*<sup>108</sup>

With the men properly trained, the group of sixteen divided themselves up between the Greyhound and Trailways bus companies. Each had two sub-groups, one being the designated testers and the other the observers. It was imperative that each man knew his role on the bus; thus according to James Peck, "which individual sat where on each lap of our trip would be planned at meetings of the group on the eve of departure."<sup>109</sup> What was clear was that one interracial pair would always sit in the white and black sections of the buses; while one black and white observer sat in each section to listen to what the other passengers were saying. These observers also took the opportunity to educate the riders on the Morgan decision and held the bail money if any of the testers was arrested. These major roles were rotated among the sixteen men on

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<sup>108</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 40.

each lap of the journey. It was imperative that each man knew the importance of all the roles. Each one of these roles ensured that the careful organization, tight discipline, and adherence to non-violent direct action remained intact. Rustin and Houser emphasized that emotion alone would not destroy Jim Crow, but that skillful strategy would. They reiterated in the training sessions that “an unorganized and undisciplined assault on segregation would only play into the hands of the segregationists, discrediting the philosophy of nonviolence and postponing the long-awaited desegregation of the South.”<sup>110</sup>

The initial leg of the Journey from Washington, D.C., to Richmond, Virginia, on April 9 was successful. Neither group on the Greyhound or Trailways line encountered any challenge to their right to sit anywhere on the buses. As Rustin noted, “the Negroes in the group sat up front and the whites in the rear.”<sup>111</sup> More satisfying was observing other passengers crossing the color line. “A white couple,” as Rustin recalled, “sat on the back seat of the Greyhound with two Negroes, while a Negro woman sat beside a young white man in the center of the bus, while leaving vacant a seat next to a Negro man.”<sup>112</sup> The success of not having any violent altercations continued from Richmond to Petersburg, Virginia, due to the Richmond courts being inundated with cases testing interstate travel. The high level of cases contributed to, as Rustin noted, “no more arrests being made there.”<sup>113</sup> While no arrests were made, Rustin and his counterparts did notice

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<sup>110</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 40.

<sup>111</sup> Bayard Rustin, Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 14.

<sup>112</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 14.

<sup>113</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 14.

a change in the attitude among passengers on the busses. The second day of the Journey, April 10 proved eye-opening to Houser, Roodenko, and Peck. All three men encountered the internalized mindset of segregation in the South. Houser and Roodenko, sitting in the rear of the Greyhound bus, spoke to a Negro man, who noted that “a Negro man might be able to get away with riding up front here, but some bus drivers are crazy, and the farther South you go, the crazier they get.”<sup>114</sup> Peck’s encounter was different from that of Houser and Roodenko. He did not engage in conversation with black passengers when he sat in the rear of the Greyhound bus, but was cautiously observed by those passengers. Two black women watching Peck read his New York Times noted with laughter that, “he would not know what it was all about if he was asked to move.”<sup>115</sup>

The first two days of the Journey proved successful in upholding the Morgan decision and challenging Jim Crow in America. The third day of the Journey produced incidents which these men would encounter the further south they traveled. Conrad Lynn, a black New York attorney, was the first Journey participant arrested for sitting in the second row of the Trailways bus. Explaining the Morgan decision to the bus driver, Lynn was told by the bus driver he, “was in the employ of the bus company, not the Supreme Court, and he followed company rules about segregation.”<sup>116</sup> The driver went on to say, “Personally, I don’t care where you sit, but I have my orders.”<sup>117</sup> When Lynn refused to move, the police were called, and a warrant signed by the magistrate in Petersburg dictated that Lynn was guilty of disorderly conduct. For not obeying “the reasonable

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<sup>114</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 15.

<sup>116</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 15.

<sup>117</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 15.

request of the bus driver to move to the rear, in compliance with the company rules,” Lynn was arrested.<sup>118</sup> Lynn was later released on a bond of \$25 dollars and rejoined the third leg of the Journey.

The third day of the campaign revealed people’s differing views on the Journey of Reconciliation and the fight against Jim Crow. Three distinctive mindsets became apparent early on; people were either supportive, against, or neutral when it came to the Journey.<sup>119</sup> A black porter, for example, expressed his disdain for what Lynn was doing. Talking directly to Lynn, he said, “What’s the matter with him? He’s crazy. Where does he think he is? We know how to deal with him. We ought to drag him off.”<sup>120</sup>

The first incident of violence on the Journey took place on the Chapel Hill to Greensboro, North Carolina, leg of the trip. Just three days into the Journey, Johnson, Felmet, Rustin, and Roodenko were all arrested the black men, Rustin and Johnson, for disorderly conduct and refusal to obey the bus driver, and the white men, Felmet and Roodenko, for interfering with the arrests of Rustin and Johnson. This leg of the Journey seemed no different from the others. There were passengers, black and white, who supported what these men were doing and those who opposed the Journey. The day turned violent when Peck suffered a hard blow to his head by a white taxi driver, who argued that the Journey participants were “coming down here to stir up the niggers.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Color did not prove to be an automatic determining factor as to if people were supportive, against, or neutral to the actions of the Journey of Reconciliation. Rather the internalization of Jim Crow and the fears associated with this doctrine determined where people placed their loyalties.

<sup>120</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 17.

Peck following his Journey training did not retaliate against the taxi driver, but rather white and black bystanders reprimanded the driver for his violent actions. The potential for an escalation in violence was clear at the police station. While Reverend Charles Jones, a white Presbyterian minister in Chapel Hill, waited for the men's \$50 bonds to be posted, he overheard white taxi drivers saying, "they'll never get a bus out of here tonight."<sup>122</sup> Reverend Jones quickly drove the men to his home while being pursued by the taxi drivers. Soon after, Jones received an anonymous phone call demanding him to "get those damn niggers out of town or we'll burn your house down."<sup>123</sup> The Journey participants thought it wise to leave Chapel Hill before nightfall, and with the assistance of the police were driven in two cars to Greensboro.

Arriving in Greensboro the men continued their Journey with two test cases from Greensboro to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Boarding Greyhound busses, Lynn, Nelson and Bromley encountered resistance not from bus drivers, but rather from the other passengers. Bromley, sitting next to a white South Carolinian who suggested "in my state he would either move or be killed," decided to use the test as a teaching opportunity to inform the man of the Morgan decision. The journey acted as a teaching opportunity on several legs of the trip. When white passengers inquired why black journey participants were not being forced to move, bus drivers and fellow passengers explained the decision of the Supreme Court in the Morgan case. In many cases, the explanation was accepted without any contention. In one particular incident, however,

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<sup>122</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 17.

<sup>123</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 17.

two white women on the Winston-Salem to Asheville, North Carolina, leg of the trip took seats in the Jim Crow section of the bus.

Day 10 of the Journey was uniquely different from the other legs of the trip. On April 19 Homer Jack and Nathan Wright bought reserved seats on a train car from Nashville to Louisville. Initially, Jack and Wright had no problem boarding the train, but this soon changed when the conductors inquired about Wright's passenger status. The conductors, while collecting tickets, asked Jack if Wright were his prisoner. When Jack replied no, that they were friends, the conductors insisted that Wright move to the Jim Crow car. Citing company rules, the conductors stated, "this is the way it is done down here."<sup>124</sup> Wright refused to move and, in response, the conductors threatened arrest and said, "If we were in Alabama, we would throw you out of the window."<sup>125</sup> When they arrived in Bowling Green, Kentucky, no arrests were made and the train leg of the journey proved successful.

Worthy, Houser, Bromley, and Nelson tested the Morgan decision on three other occasions on the Norfolk and Western and Southern Railway railroads. While they met with consternation by conductors, none of the men was turned away or forbidden to sit in the section of his choice and no arrests, even when threatened, were made.<sup>126</sup>

The last leg of the bus trip went from Charlottesville, Virginia to Washington, D.C., on April 23. Banks, Peck, and Randle rode without incident the first two hours of the trip. Banks rode by himself in the front of the Trailways bus, while Peck and Randle

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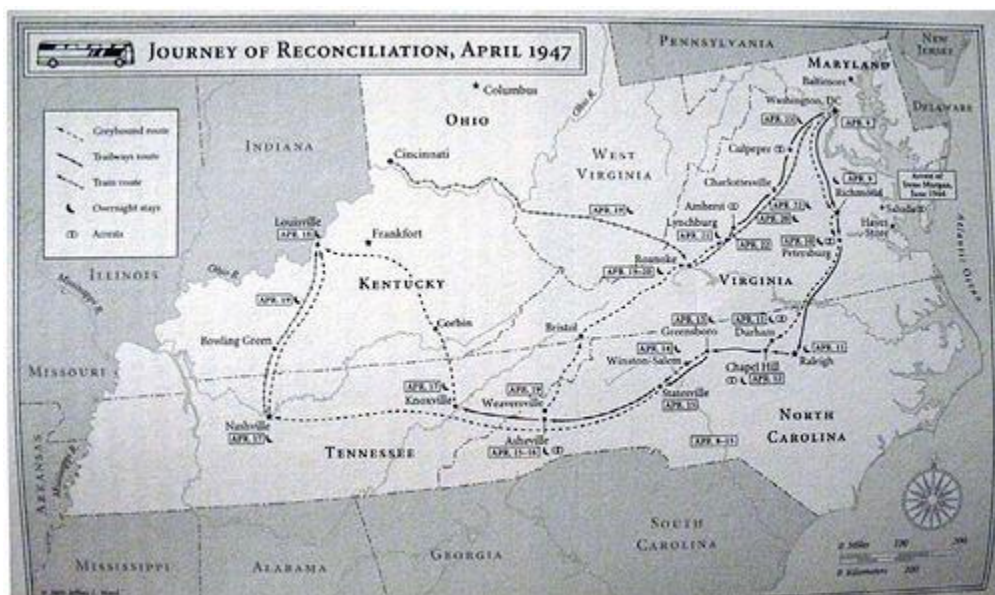
<sup>124</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 19.

<sup>125</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 19.

<sup>126</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 21.

rode in the Jim Crow rear of the bus. When the bus arrived in Culpepper, the bus driver asked Banks to move to the rear of the bus. Banks refused, and an hour-and-a half later a warrant was issued for his arrest on the grounds of “not obeying the order of the driver.”<sup>127</sup> The bus driver never said anything to Peck, even though he was in violation of the company policy, which stipulated “That white persons shall not sit in the rear.”<sup>128</sup>

Fifteen cities in four states were traveled by the interracial Journey participants with twenty-six compliance tests and twelve arrests, all on the Trailways bus lines.<sup>129</sup>



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<sup>127</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 21.

<sup>128</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Petersburg, Durham, Chapel Hill, Asheville, North Carolina, Amherst, and Culpepper, Virginia were the six locations where the arrests were made.

<sup>130</sup> Ruby Sinreich, Route of the Journey of Reconciliation 1947 in “Chapel Hill Remembers,” (01-30-2008) (<http://forusa.org/ruby-sinreich/chapel-hill-remembers>) accessed 04-18-2011



Conrad Lynn, Bayard Rustin, Andrew Johnson, Joseph Felmet, Igal Roodenko, Dennis Banks, James Peck, and Wallace Nelson were all arrested for violating Jim Crow segregation company policies. While all the men were released on bonds that ranged from \$25 to \$400 dollars, they had to face trials for their violation of state laws. The trials for these infractions quickly followed the end of the Journey of Reconciliation. Most of these trials were resolved to the satisfaction of CORE and the Journey participants. Of greatest concern were the Chapel Hill trials. Andrew Johnson and Joe Felmet were among the first to stand trial for breaking state Jim Crow laws. In June 1947, Rustin, Johnson, Felmet, and Roodenko stood trial for violating North Carolina's Jim Crow laws. Both Rustin and Johnson received minor fines, but Felmet and Roodenko were each sentenced to thirty days on a road gang. The judges in these cases emphasized their disdain for the actions of white participants in the Journey; thus the harsher sentences. One judge went on record as saying that he "purposely discriminated against the white person[s] involved."<sup>131</sup> The men appealed the court's decision to the Orange County Superior Court in March 1948, but an all-white jury after twenty minutes of deliberation agreed with the lower court's decision. With the convictions sustained, the judge increased the sentences of Rustin and Johnson to thirty-day road gang terms. This sentence for Rustin, Johnson, Felmet, and Roodenko was upheld by the State Supreme Court in January 1949.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Rustin, Down the Line, 21.

<sup>132</sup> Meier and Rudwick, "The First Freedom Ride," 220.

James Peck and Dennis Banks went on trial in Asheville, North Carolina, and were represented by Curtis Todd, a black attorney from Winston-Salem.<sup>133</sup> The men were indicted on the charge of violating Jim Crow law. Judge Sam Cathey, from the start of the trial, emphasized that, “We pride ourselves on our race relations here [in Asheville].”<sup>134</sup> The reality of Jim Crow was firmly in place within the Asheville courtroom. As Peck recalled:

In the courtroom where we were tried I saw the most fantastic extreme of segregation in my experience—Jim Crow Bibles. Along the edges of one Bible had been printed in large letters the words ‘white.’ Along the page edges of the other Bible was the word ‘colored.’ When a white person swore in he simply raised his right hand while the clerk held the Bible. When a Negro swore in, he had to raise his right hand while holding the colored Bible in his left hand. The white clerk could not touch the colored Bible.<sup>135</sup>

Witnesses for the state—the police and bus driver— emphasized how the men were not disorderly and educated them and other passengers on the Morgan decision. Todd argued that the Morgan decision, a decision that neither the judge nor the state’s attorney was familiar with, protected Peck and Banks from prosecution. After borrowing a copy of the Morgan decision from Todd, Judge Cathey, with blatant disregard for the decision, rendered a verdict of the maximum thirty-day sentence for Peck and Banks.<sup>136</sup>

The Journey of Reconciliation came at a time when men and women were trying to change the social construction of American society. They wanted to make men and

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<sup>133</sup> Curtis Todd drew attention to the trial because he was the first black attorney to appear in an Asheville court. There were no black attorneys in Asheville during this period.

<sup>134</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 49.

<sup>135</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 49.

<sup>136</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 52.

women of all cultures aware of the epidemic of inequality in the country. The Journey became, as Ollie Stewart, a writer for the Baltimore Afro-American, noted, “a watershed event [where] history was definitely made.”<sup>137</sup> The Journey challenged the Jim Crow mentality that was internally indoctrinated into how people lived. These men set out to change how people thought, felt, and acted. CORE wanted an integrated society that was capable of rising above racial segregation and that would insure for blacks and whites a greater democracy. The Journey of Reconciliation, for CORE, could invoke this fundamental change and achieve an open society in the nation. These men were bringing direct attention to the “wounds inflicted by 350 years of deprivation.”<sup>138</sup> They tested the vitality of racial democracy in this country. What these idealistic men and women failed to foresee was the arduous battle that a Jim Crow society was ready to mount to maintain segregation.

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<sup>137</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 52.

<sup>138</sup> Statement by James Farmer for New York Times Magazine, National Director of CORE, CORE archives, Wisconsin.



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UNTIL THE CUP THAT WE DRINK FROM IS THE VERY SAME: THE 1961 CORE  
FREEDOM RIDE

We knew they would probably beat us before we got there. We were willing to give our all so men of every race, creed, and color may be equal before the law. We'll batter your segregation institutions until they crumble to dust.<sup>140</sup>

*William Barbee—American Baptist Theological Seminary student  
and 1961 Freedom Ride participant*

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<sup>139</sup> Joseph Postiglione, Burned Freedom Bus, Collection of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in David Gonzalez Lens Blog, NYTimes.com. (<http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com>) accessed 04-18-2011.

<sup>140</sup> Bob Duke, "2 Mob Victims Ready to Die for Integration," Montgomery Advertiser, (May 21, 1961) *Excerpted in Reporting Civil Rights*, 587.

We'll go on until we win, though, we were pretty battered today. I've always felt strongly that segregation is wrong. This was something we could do—it wasn't far away in the Congo. I realized I couldn't stand by and talk about it.<sup>141</sup>

*Susan Wibur—An eighteen-year-old Peabody College student.*

The goal of the 1961 Freedom Rides was to end racial segregation on interstate bus transportation, as well as to combat the discriminating practice of Jim Crow. As James Farmer recalled,

It was February 1, 1961, my first day at my desk as national director of CORE. Several letters were already before me from blacks in the South, complaining that despite the Irene Morgan Supreme Court decision in 1946 and the Boynton decision in 1960, when they sat on the front seat of an interstate bus or tried to use waiting room facilities other than those consigned to blacks, they were beaten, ejected, or arrested. What do decisions of the United States Supreme Court mean? They asked.<sup>142</sup>

The Freedom Rides tested the enforcement of the 1960 Boynton v. Virginia decision. In 1958 Howard University law student Bruce Boynton was arrested for trying to desegregate the whites-only restaurant in the Trailways terminal of Richmond, Virginia. The Supreme Court in December of 1960 overturned Boynton's conviction and stipulated that state-driven laws condoning segregated lunch counters, restroom facilities, and waiting rooms were unconstitutional for interstate passengers. This ruling furthered the constitutional bite of the Morgan decision of 1946, which prohibited racial segregation on interstate trains and buses.

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<sup>141</sup> Derek Charles Catsam, "MISTER, THIS IS NOT YOUR FIGHT!: THE 1961 MONTGOMERY FREEDOM RIDE RIOTS," Studies in the Literary Imagination, 40 (Fall 2007), 103.

<sup>142</sup> James Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement, (Forth Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985), 195-196.

Farmer faced the dilemma of having constitutional decisions that favored desegregation, but local and state governments not willing to enforce those decisions. Black southerners, according to Raymond Arsenault, wanted to understand why “black Americans [were] still being harassed or arrested when they tried to exercise their constitutional right to sit in the front of the bus or to drink a cup of coffee at a bus terminal restaurant?”<sup>143</sup> Gordon Carey and Tom Gaither, two members of Farmer’s staff, proposed during a staff meeting another Journey of Reconciliation. Both Carey and Gaither, after a long bus trip from South Carolina to New York endorsed forming a small group of men and women to challenge Jim Crow segregation in bus and train terminals. A project of this magnitude fit perfectly in with, as Arsenault noted, “The scrappy nonviolent movement that had emerged since the Greensboro sit-ins.”<sup>144</sup> They envisioned that a “Ride for Freedom,” a phrase coined by Billie Ames, a longtime CORE member, was just what Farmer needed to rectify the black southern dilemma.<sup>145</sup>

The Freedom Ride mirrored the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, as Farmer noted, with “small interracial groups riding interstate busses through the South with blacks sitting on front seats and the whites on back seats, refusing to move when ordered.”<sup>146</sup> At each terminal stop, as Carey suggested, “whites [would] go into the waiting room ‘for

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<sup>143</sup> Raymond Arsenault, Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Radical Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) , 93.

<sup>144</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 94.

<sup>145</sup> Gordon Carey and Tom Gaither derived the term “Freedom Ride” from Billie Ames 1950’s “Ride for Freedom” phrase. Carey, influenced by Louis Fisher’s biography of Gandhi, envisioned the Freedom Ride like Gandhi’s march to the sea.

<sup>146</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 196.

colored' and blacks into the waiting room 'for white'.”<sup>147</sup> While similarities existed between the Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Ride of 1961, the goal of Farmer and CORE was not to duplicate the Journey, but to win equality for blacks in the South. CORE was determined to, as Farmer recalled, “to put the movement on wheels... to cut across state lines and establish the position that we were entitled to act any place in the country, no matter where we hung our hat and called home, because it was our country.”<sup>148</sup> There was no longer a call, as Farmer stated, “for a ‘reconciliation’, but for ‘freedom’.”<sup>149</sup> As John Lewis, one of the Freedom Riders, recalled, “There was a tone of demand in that phrase, a sense of proclamation, of no waiting. Freedom. As in ‘Freedom Now’.”<sup>150</sup> CORE wanted to hold the federal government accountable for not enforcing the laws. CORE’s initiative, “if, in some way,” Lewis later noted, “might become more politically dangerous for the federal government not to enforce those laws than to enforce them, things would begin to change. If, for example, those states were forced to visibly—even violently—defy the law, with the whole nation looking on, then the federal government would be forced to respond in ways it had not so far.”<sup>151</sup>

There were major differences that existed between the two action movements. First, CORE opened up the Freedom Ride of 1961 to men and women; second, the group would penetrate into the Deep South. Carey proposed covering a mapped route from

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<sup>147</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 196.

<sup>148</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 94.

<sup>149</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 196.

<sup>150</sup> John Lewis with Michael D’Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998), 133.

<sup>151</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 132-133.

Washington, D.C., to New Orleans that covered parts of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Finally, Farmer and his staff discussed the use of the jail-in tactic during the Freedom Ride. They were going to ask all participants to choose to stay in jail, if arrested. The “jail-no bail” was a Gandhian technique that, Farmer explained made, “the maintenance of segregation so expensive for the state and city that they would hopefully come to the conclusion that they could no longer afford it. Fill up the jails, as Gandhi did in India; fill them to bursting if we had to.”<sup>152</sup> The Freedom Ride of 1961 was a capital idea and as Farmer thought, “a superb answer to the question ‘What next?’”<sup>153</sup>

While the idea was bold, it was still just an idea. Farmer and his CORE staff needed to take this action plan and put it in motion. Marvin Rich, Jim McCain, and Carey took the lead in organizing the Freedom Ride, while Gaither like his predecessors, Houser and Rustin, made a preliminary trip on the proposed route. Following the same procedure, he coordinated housing for the participants, set up rallies, and tried to secure support from local NAACP chapter leaders.<sup>154</sup> The most important part of Gaither’s advance scouting trip was to gauge the state of race relations in the southern cities and states marked by the Freedom Ride campaign. Gaither encountered mixed reactions from southern blacks as he continued his scouting trip. There were blacks who wanted no part of the northern CORE troublemakers, while others were indecisive over whether to help or hinder the CORE initiative. In the end, Gaither was able to find support for the

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<sup>152</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 94.

<sup>153</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 196.

<sup>154</sup> Gaither encountered mixed responses from southern NAACP chapters. While some chapter leaders, like Richmond NAACP, refused outright to support, there were others, like Greensboro that extended sympathetic support.



Freedom Riders. Gaither relied heavily on the staple organizations in the black community to support the Freedom Ride and its Riders. He secured for the Riders, within black Baptist churches to private black colleges, sponsors from Virginia to Louisiana. Gaither guarded his elation because he understood that these sponsors were taking a huge risk in supporting the Freedom Ride. What these communities promised in early April might not manifest into actual action come May when the Riders showed up in the cities.<sup>155</sup>

Gaither's observation of the white southerner's compliance with the Morgan and Boynton decisions was less optimistic. Southern defiance and the belligerent attitude of the whites Gaither encountered in Mississippi and Alabama stunned him. "If the Freedom Riders challenged the ultra-segregationists of the Deep South without the benefit of police protection," Gaither concluded, "they would be lucky to escape with their lives."<sup>156</sup> Gaither, not one to sugarcoat a situation, noted in his report to Farmer that Anniston and Birmingham were two cities that had great potential of being "very explosive trouble spots without a doubt."<sup>157</sup>

The next step in establishing the Freedom Ride was getting approval from the National Action Committee (NAC) at the February 11-12 council meeting in Lexington, Kentucky. The approval and subsequent support from the NAC were crucial, for there existed, according to Farmer, a perception that CORE chapters and members did not want

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<sup>155</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 96- 97.

<sup>156</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 97.

<sup>157</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 97.

a “mass movement, but a small, tightly disciplined cadre of well-trained individuals.”<sup>158</sup>

The Freedom Ride was a symbol of a new National CORE at the forefront of the Civil Rights movement.

Farmer, following CORE protocol, wrote to President John F. Kennedy, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—J. Edgar Hoover, the Interstate Commerce Commission chairman, and the presidents of Trailways and Greyhound corporations to inform them of the impending Freedom Ride. Farmer recalled later that this step was “in line with the Gandhian principle of being open and aboveboard, informing officials—even those unfriendly to the cause—of what we intended to do, how, and when.”<sup>159</sup> Farmer wrote first to President Kennedy:

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<sup>158</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 196.

<sup>159</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 197.

*The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.*

*My dear Mr. President:*

*We expect you will be interested in our Freedom Ride, 1961. It is designed to forward the completion of integrated bus service and accommodations in the Deep South. About fifteen CORE members will travel as inter-state passengers on Greyhound and Trailways routes. We leave Washington early in May and, traveling through Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, plan to arrive in New Orleans on Wednesday May 17<sup>th</sup>.*

*The group is interracial, Two-thirds are Southerners. Three are women. We propose to challenge, en route, every form of segregation met by the bus passenger. We are experienced in, and dedicated to, the Gandhian principles of non-violence.*

*Our plans are entirely open. Further information is available to all.*

*Freedom Ride is an appeal to the best in all Americans. We travel peaceably to persuade them that Jim Crow betrays democracy. It degrades democracy at home. It debases democracy abroad. We feel that there is no way to overstate the danger that denial of democratic and constitutional rights brings to our beloved country.*

*And so we feel it our duty to affirm our principles by asserting our rights. With the survival of democracy at stake, there is an imperative, immediate need for acts of self-determination. "Abandon your animosities and make your sons Americans," said Robert E. Lee. Freedom Ride would make that "All your sons—NOW!"*

*Sincerely yours,  
James Farmer  
National Director  
April 26, 1961<sup>160</sup>*

Farmer, with endorsement from the NAC and the protocol of alerting officials, went forward with planning the Freedom Ride. He and his staff decided to recruit, through an application process, twelve to fourteen participants and bring them to

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<sup>160</sup> CORE Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Washington, D.C., for a week of intensive training before embarking on the ride. The riders would range in age and be split between the Greyhound and Trailways bus companies. The Freedom Ride of 1961 followed Rustin and Houser's 1947 Journey outline. The group of thirteen assembled in Washington, D.C., at the Fellowship House in late April for their training, and, as Farmer recalled, "would leave Washington on May 4, travel through Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, and arrive in New Orleans on May 17, the seventh anniversary of the Brown decision."<sup>161</sup>

Farmer and his staff planned a detailed Freedom Ride itinerary that included all the cities and some of the meetings they would hold on the trip. The itinerary, according to Farmer, went as follows,

*May 4—Leave Washington; arrive Richmond, Virginia, Virginia Union University*  
*May 5—Leave Richmond; arrive Petersburg, Virginia, Bethany Baptist Church*  
*May 6—Leave Petersburg; arrive Lynchburg, Virginia, 8<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church*  
*May 7—Leave Lynchburg; arrive Greensboro, North Carolina*  
*May 8—Leave Greensboro; arrive Charlotte, North Carolina*  
*May 9—Leave Charlotte; arrive Rock Hill, South Carolina*  
*May 10—Leave Rock Hill, South Carolina; arrive Sumter, South Carolina for two nights*  
*May 11—Day off in Sumter*  
*May 12—Leave Sumter; arrive in Augustus, Georgia*  
*May 13—Leave Augustus, Georgia; arrive Atlanta, Georgia*  
*May 14—Leave Atlanta, Georgia; arrive Birmingham, Alabama*  
*May 15—Leave Birmingham, Alabama; arrive Montgomery, Alabama*  
*May 16—Leave Montgomery, Alabama; arrive Jackson, Mississippi*  
*May 17—Leave Jackson, Mississippi; arrive New Orleans, Louisiana for Freedom Rally<sup>162</sup>*

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<sup>161</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 96.

<sup>162</sup> CORE Archives



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James Peck, one of the original Journey participants, was familiar with this outline as he was the only returning rider to the Freedom Ride. He felt, after fourteen years, a rebirth of the original Journey rider's dream of social equality, but also acknowledged there was an ideological difference between this new group and the original Journey riders.<sup>164</sup> In Peck's words,

It was a very different type of group from the one, which had gathered in Washington fourteen years previously for the same type of project. It included a number of what has become known as the 'new Negro.' Southern students who

<sup>163</sup> Ruby Sinreich, Route of the Journey of Freedom Ride 1961 in "Chapel Hill Remembers," (01-30-2008) (<http://forusa.org/ruby-sinreich/chapel-hill-remembers>) accessed 04-18-2011

<sup>164</sup> While Houser and Rustin felt the same sense of vindication for the Freedom Ride, they did not play an active role in the planning or implementation of the second freedom ride.

took part in the sit-in movement and for whom arrest or the threat thereof had become commonplace. Most of the group were young people in their twenties. Very few of them were pacifists.<sup>165</sup>

While Peck's observations, in hindsight, had merit, Farmer and CORE wanted a unique group of participants that were committed to the ideological principles of the CORE organization. CORE put in place an application to select the twelve to fourteen Freedom riders. Each applicant had to include a letter of recommendation from a pastor, teacher, or co-worker and had to write a letter explaining, as Arsenault noted, "their commitment to nonviolence and the struggle for civil rights."<sup>166</sup> Farmer wanted people who looked at non-violence as a lifestyle and not just a strong civil rights tactic. One other stipulation was parental permission for those volunteers under the age of twenty-one.<sup>167</sup> By late April, Farmer and Carey, had a plethora of applications to mold their group of Freedom riders.

The new riders included,

**James Farmer**—the forty-one-year old National Director of CORE

**Joe Perkins**—a black twenty-seven-year old CORE staff member

**Dr. Walter Bergman**—a sixty-one-year old white professor of education at the University of Michigan

**Frances Bergman**—the fifty-seven-year old, former elementary school teacher and wife of Dr. Walter Bergman

**Reverend B. Elton Cox**—a twenty-nine-year old black minister

**Albert Bigelow**—a fifty-five-year old white navy veteran of World War II

**Hank Thomas**—a black nineteen-year-old Howard University student

**Jimmy McDonald**—a black twenty-nine-year-old part-time CORE staff member and folk singer

**Charles Person**—an eighteen-year old Morehouse College student

**John Moody**—a thirty-year-old black student at Howard University

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<sup>165</sup> James Peck, Freedom Ride, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 115.

<sup>166</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 99.

<sup>167</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 99.

*John Lewis—a twenty-one-year old black student at Tennessee Bible Institute in Nashville*  
*Ed Blankenheim—a twenty-seven-year old white CORE activist*  
*Genevieve Hughes—a white twenty-eight-year old CORE field secretary*  
*James Peck—original Journey rider and CORE pacifist*<sup>168</sup>

Many of the new black riders were not over thirty and were as August Meier and Elliott Rudwick noted, “products of the southern student sit-in movement....”<sup>169</sup> Each black rider brought unique life and civil rights experiences to the Freedom Ride.

Hank Thomas was a last-minute replacement for John Moody his ill-stricken Howard University college roommate.<sup>170</sup> What Thomas lacked in orientation training and age, he more than made up for in firsthand experience with the Jim Crow South. Thomas was one of eleven children who sharecropped cotton in Georgia by the age of eight. When asked what led him to the Freedom Ride, Thomas recalled years later, “I can’t say it was one. When you grow up and face humiliation every day, there is no one thing. You always felt that way.”<sup>171</sup> Coming from this impoverished background, the Freedom Ride for Thomas was a direct strike against the dehumanization suffered by southern blacks like him.<sup>172</sup>

Jimmy McDonald was the ideal participant to relieve the mounting stress of the Freedom Ride. A folk singer from New York, McDonald remembered that, “they wanted

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<sup>168</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 197.

<sup>169</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement: 1942-1968 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 136.

<sup>170</sup> John Moody returned to the Freedom Ride three weeks after the official start date. With his health and composure intact, he joined the Montgomery to Jackson leg of the Freedom Ride.

<sup>171</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 103.

<sup>172</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 103.

‘me to go... to lead the singing.’”<sup>173</sup> McDonald’s vocal ability was not his only contribution, but also how he came to reflect the new ideal of the “New Negro.” He was, as John Lewis later noted, “a very playful, bohemian, Greenwich Village guy, [who] added comic relief and a touch of whimsy to the band of Freedom Riders.”<sup>174</sup> McDonald, though, was a “loose cannon that exhibited the least discipline amongst the Freedom Riders. He was, as Arsenault described, “... uncomfortable with the interracial nature of CORE and generally dismissive of nonviolence as a viable philosophy, [and] he viewed the bus journey through the South as a chance for adventure and a ‘great ride.’”<sup>175</sup> In 1969, McDonald recalled, “I was not sent because I had a lot of intellect ... certainly I was not in there because I wanted to be like Gandhi.”<sup>176</sup>

Charles Person, the youngest Freedom Rider at eighteen, was a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Person had a vast array of experience with sit-in and jail-in campaigns. He was also a part of the NAACP Youth Council at Morehouse and was active in the Atlanta Committee on Appeal for Human Rights. This ride was personal for Person, a native of Atlanta, who watched his father work as an orderly at Emory University Hospital. Person grew up wanting to be a scientist and in 1960, the all-white Georgia Institute of Technology denied him admittance. He hoped the ride could change the future for young men and women having aspirations to go to the best schools and achieve their dreams.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 101.

<sup>174</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 101.

<sup>175</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 101.

<sup>176</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 101.

<sup>177</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 103-104.



John Moody, the thirty-year-old Howard University student was active in his college's chapter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's Nonviolent Action Group (NAG). Moody and NAG staged several sit-in protests in Washington, Maryland, and northern Virginia. Raised in Philadelphia, Moody was active in civil rights from a young age; as a leader in his local NAACP Youth Council. Moody was both intrigued and terrified by the world of Jim Crow; he showed vacillation toward the Freedom Ride initiative as the May 4 start date approached. He eventually, due to this uncertainty and the flu, temporarily dropped out of the Freedom Ride on the last day of orientation.<sup>178</sup>

Reverend Benjamin Elton Cox, the oldest Southern black Freedom Rider at twenty-nine next to James Farmer, was an old wise soul in a young body. His fellow Freedom Riders knew him as "Belton' Elton" for his charismatic and loquacious nature as a preacher. One of sixteen children and initially a high school dropout, when he finished his divinity degree and was ordained in 1958, he became the head pastor at the Pilgrim Congregational Church in High Point, North Carolina. Reverend Cox was at the forefront of the fight because of his militant advocacy for the Civil Rights Movement. From his leadership in local school desegregation efforts to serving as the NAACP Youth council advisor, Cox remained involved in the civil rights movement. Farmer personally asked Cox to join the Freedom Ride because of his commitment to nonviolent direct action. Cox contributed the "divine guidance" needed for the Freedom Ride to maintain its nonviolent direct action pledge.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 103.

<sup>179</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 104.

Joe Perkins, a former medical technician in the army, grew up in Owensboro, Kentucky, completed four years at Kentucky State University, and majored in music education at Howard University before transferring to the University of Michigan. While at the University of Michigan, Joe and other graduate students became involved in the Ann Arbor Direct Action Committee. He picketed Kresge and Woolworth's department stores in support of the southern sit-in movement and organized a stand-in at the Newport Beach on Lake Erie. Joe eventually took a leave of absence from the University of Michigan to work full-time for CORE as a field secretary. With arrests and direct action campaigns in Louisville, Covington, and numerous other cities, Perkins earned as Arsenault noted, "a reputation as a skilled and fearless organizer."<sup>180</sup>

John Lewis, the captivating twenty-one-year old representative of the Nashville Movement was by far the most experienced black Freedom Rider. A member of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, by the time he learned of the Freedom Ride, he had a record of five arrests and had tested the jail-no bail as a viable nonviolent tactic in the movement.

These young men and women or the "New Negro" had, like their older counterparts, an "unquestioning commitment to securing equality for blacks in the United States."<sup>181</sup> Their devotion was due to their belief, as John Lewis noted on his application, to "human dignity [being] the most important thing in [their] life. This is [the] most

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<sup>180</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 100.

<sup>181</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 103.

important decision in my life, to decide to give up all if necessary for the Freedom Ride, that Justice and Freedom might come to the Deep South.”<sup>182</sup>

The white participants were older than their black counterparts with different life experiences, but those experiences contributed to their commitment to the Freedom Ride. Dr. Walter Bergman and Francis Bergman, his wife, were the oldest participants in the ride. Walter Bergman, at sixty-one, brought unique activist experiences stemming from his leadership in the teachers’ union in the 1930’s and 1940’s. As a retired administrator with teaching experiences at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University, Mr. Bergman served as the first president of the Michigan Federation of Teachers. After a brief stint in military service in Europe, Bergman lived in Germany where he served as a civilian educator in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and later in the U.S. government’s de-Nazification program.<sup>183</sup> Returning to the states in 1948, Bergman rekindled his relationship with the Michigan Federation of Teachers and became the director of research for the Detroit Board of Education.<sup>184</sup>

Frances Bergman, at fifty-seven was the second eldest rider. Like her husband, whom she met and married in the late 1940’s, she was a peace activist in her own right. A former elementary educator and administrator, Frances was a seasoned northern civil rights activist by the time of the Freedom Ride campaign. Both Bergman and his wife Frances were committed socialists, as well as activists in the ACLU and the Committee

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<sup>182</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 103.

<sup>183</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 100.

<sup>184</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 100.

for a Sane Nuclear Policy.<sup>185</sup> Their activism led them by 1958 to participate in CORE picketing initiatives against segregation in chain stores, swimming pools and hotels in Detroit, Michigan.<sup>186</sup> Frances also represented a change from the Journey of Reconciliation ride, which was male. She and Genevieve Hughes were the only two females on the Freedom Ride.<sup>187</sup>

Albert Bigelow, the fifty-five- year-old navy war veteran, in no way fit the traditional image of a peace activist, but he had been a force in the anti-nuclear crusade initiative in the late 1950's. As a founding member of the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), he gained national attention when, in protest of the United States testing of nuclear warheads, he captained the Golden Rule in the Pacific. The former navy captain turned Quaker opposed the use of nuclear technology after witnessing the physical devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Bigelow, determined to end the use of nuclear armament, warned President Dwight D. Eisenhower that though "our voices have been lost in the massive effort of those responsible for preparing this country for war... we mean to speak now with the weight of our whole lives."<sup>188</sup> This commitment to pacifism and non-violent direct action made Bigelow a good Freedom Rider.

Ed Blankenheim, a twenty-seven-year-old Korean War veteran and father of two, was involved in Tucson civil rights activities. Initially, a member of Tucson's NAACP Youth Council, Blankenheim formed the Students for Equality as a local Tucson CORE chapter. Blankenheim's experiences as a marine recruit in Paris Island, South Carolina,

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<sup>185</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 100.

<sup>186</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 100.

<sup>187</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 99-101.

<sup>188</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 101.

made him cautious of challenging the racial mindsets of the Deep South. Blankenheim recalled, “[I] was being invited on a trip into the Deep South as part of a mixed race bomb... I was no less concerned about the danger of my commitment, but all that I had seen in the South and all that I had learned stared me down. I had come too far and I couldn’t turn back.”<sup>189</sup>

Genevieve Hughes, the feisty twenty-eight-year-old CORE field secretary, was adamant about showing the world a true Southern woman. After being asked why she joined the Freedom Riders, she explained, “I figured Southern women should be represented so the South and the nation would realize all Southern people don’t think alike.”<sup>190</sup> Hughes moved to New York City following her graduation from Cornell and became involved in the local CORE chapter. Hughes’s appointment to CORE field secretary in 1960 completed her transition from conservative Wall Street to full-time non-violent direct activism. She was “as graceful,” as John Lewis recalled, “And gentle as her name,” and she was “not afraid to speak up when she had strong feelings about something.”<sup>191</sup>

James Baldwin wrote in his Foreword to James Peck’s Freedom Ride,

If we cannot reorganize our society on a more human and equitable basis, we will soon, as citizens, have lost any ability to reorganize it at all. This is why the Negro’s struggle in America today is of the greatest importance for all Americans, whether they know it or not. Countless people, both white and black, are now undergoing the most brutal hardships in order to drive this fact deep into the public consciousness. Here is the testimony of one of them: and the moral of his

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<sup>189</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 102.

<sup>190</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 99.

<sup>191</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 99.

story is that, however painful it may be for us to change, not to change will be fatal.<sup>192</sup>

James Peck was the only returning Journey participant to the Freedom Rides. The Journey had made desegregation a reality, and as Peck later wrote, had “ordinary Negro passengers no longer confined to the rear seats.”<sup>193</sup> What it did not do was destroy segregation. As Peck noted, “the outstanding comparison [between the Journey and Freedom Ride] was that, in terminals and at the rest stops—even in Virginia’s larger cities where the white and colored signs had been removed—segregation still prevailed as it had aboard the busses in 1947.”<sup>194</sup> The persistence of Jim Crow segregation motivated Peck to return fourteen years later and fight to convince people that they no longer had to ride Jim Crow busses, or to accept segregation in public facilities like terminal waiting areas and restaurants.

These seven blacks and six whites assembled in Washington, D.C., for an initial orientation to hear the rationale for why CORE was embarking on this Freedom Ride. Farmer provided an overview of what the next two weeks would entail. He revealed both the pessimistic and optimistic outcomes, as well as the challenges, which the Freedom Riders would face. He also emphasized that this was a CORE initiative and everyone involved needed to be as one in regards to non-violent direct action. If riders could not adhere to these CORE principles, they needed to remove themselves from the project. After Farmer’s initial greeting of the riders, he turned the podium over to Carl Rachlin, a

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<sup>192</sup> Peck, Freedom, 8.

<sup>193</sup> Peck, Freedom, 116.

<sup>194</sup> Peck, Freedom, 116.

forty-two-year-old civil rights and labor attorney from New York City. Serving as CORE's general counsel, Rachlin proceeded to inform the Riders of their constitutional rights—both state and federal—pertaining to interstate travel. He went into detail about, as Farmer recalled, “the Supreme’s Court’s ruling on the issues and summarized the current situation. From his viewpoint, he told [the Riders] what to do if and when [they] were arrested...”<sup>195</sup> Farmer wanted these men and women to understand the legal aspect of the Freedom Rides, but he also placed great importance on the sociological mentality of the South. Bringing the perspective of both a sociologist and experienced social activist into the orientation, Farmer painted a realistic picture for the Riders of what they should expect from the South. As Farmer later noted, the sociologist “elaborated on the mores and folkways of the areas through which we would be riding and described the lengths to which the local populace probably would go to force compliance with their sacrosanct racial customs.”<sup>196</sup> Farmer was determined not to sugar coat what the Riders would encounter in the Deep South. Engrained in the southern populace was a strong defiance mentality that the Riders had to know could lead to, as the social activist suggested, “clobberings and death.”<sup>197</sup>

Throughout the week of training, the Riders had long discussions over the gravity of what they were about to carry out. There was a level of electricity but also a serious undertone to the conversations and training. Freedom Riders, like John Lewis, shared their experiences with Jim Crow and the use of non-violence. Each of their stories was

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<sup>195</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 198.

<sup>196</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 107.

<sup>197</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 198.

indicative of why these men and women felt it necessary to participate in this CORE initiative.<sup>198</sup> “The discussions,” Farmer later explained, “were neither academic nor undisciplined rapping; each person, after all, was offering to put his or her life on the line. The air was filled with electricity, not frivolity.”<sup>199</sup> The Riders, in addition to discussions, were encouraged to read non-violent action rhetoric. For Farmer, it was important for the Riders to understand the teachings of Gandhi and other advocates of non-violent principles. The Riders had to prepare themselves for every type of response to their non-violent direct action. These men and women had to embrace the true nature of Gandhi’s Satyagraha and reflect, through their actions, their commitment to civil disobedience.

As Dr. Martin Luther King explained the principles of nonviolence,

We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, but we cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children; send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities and drag us out on some wayside road, beating us and leaving us half-dead; send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and as difficult as it is, we will still love you. But we will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process. We will not only win freedom for ourselves, but our victory will be a double victory.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> John Lewis and classmate Bernard Lafayette traveled home during Christmas break challenging the direct violation of the Morgan decision. Both Lewis and Lafayette sat in the front section of the bus traveling from Nashville to Birmingham, and refused every request by the bus driver to move to the back of the bus. Even with the implied threat of the bus driver that he would alert the Ku Klux Klan, Lewis and Lafayette remained in their seats until their final destination in Troy, Alabama.

<sup>199</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 198.

<sup>200</sup> Martin Luther King, Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 217.



The Freedom Ride campaign and CORE would have serious ideological problems if the Freedom Riders were not fully committed to the above non-violent sentiment as a lifestyle and not just a tactic.

The most intense part of training came with the socio-drama sessions. Gordon Carey took the lead in coordinating several real bus and lunch counter scenarios that the Riders could expect. The Riders took turns being either observers, adversaries, or functionaries in the role-playing sessions. “Several played,” according to Farmer, “the role of white hoodlums coming in to beat up the Freedom Riders on the buses or at the lunch counters in the terminals.”<sup>201</sup> “The dramas were for survival,” Farmer recalled, “not entertainment [thus] people were thrown out of bus seats and clubbed, knocked off lunch counter stools and stomped.”<sup>202</sup> The all-too realistic sessions went on for three days because Farmer wanted to insure the Riders had the proper survival skills in place for the real threat of violence. Each Rider had an opportunity to play each role and critique their actions and reactions. Fueled with intense emotion were the discussions that followed each sociodrama. “It was quite an experience,” according to Ben Cox. “We were knocked on the floor, we poured Coca-Cola and coffee on each other, and there was shoving and calling each other all kinds of racial epithets, and even spitting on each other, which would inflame you to see if you could stand what was going to come.”<sup>203</sup> For most of the Riders, these intense sociodramas symbolized their first encounter with the essence of Jim Crow. Emotionally drained by the arduous training, many of the Riders found these

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<sup>201</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 198.

<sup>202</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 198.

<sup>203</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 107.

Jim Crow scenarios a disturbing ordeal and questioned whether the initiative was worth the real threat of maltreatment.

Farmer decided to ease the emotional tension of the group by taking them to Yen Ching Palace, a Chinese restaurant in downtown Washington D.C. on the eve of their departure.<sup>204</sup> As John Lewis recalled, “As we passed around the bright silver containers of food someone joked that we should eat well and enjoy because this might be our Last Supper.”<sup>205</sup> Evident was the fictive kin bond that formed among the men and women embarking on this life-altering experience. The emotions settled, and a genuine camaraderie filled the room as the Freedom Riders continued their meals. As the dinner ended, Farmer wanted all of the Riders to know that they were not obligated to go on this ride. As Farmer remembered,

I spoke briefly from my chair at the head of the table. There were no theatrics, no melodrama; the situation itself was too fraught with emotion for embellishment. I told the group, which had become like family, that no one was obligated to go on the trip except possibly me. There was still time for any person to decide not to go. Everyone should ask himself or herself at that point whether or not he or she really wanted to go. If the decision was negative, there would be no recrimination, no blame, and CORE would pay transportation back home. ... I stated that no one had to announce a decision right then. He or she could tell me later or just not show up at the bus terminal in the morning, whichever was easiest.<sup>206</sup>

After a moment of silence suggested by Farmer over a prayer, the men and women left the restaurant and returned to the Fellowship House in a somber mood.<sup>207</sup>

Some Riders decided to talk over Farmer’s offer in a large grouping, debating the

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<sup>204</sup> The Yen Ching Chinese restaurant was managed by Paul Dietrich, a NAG activist.

<sup>205</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 108.

<sup>206</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 198.

<sup>207</sup> Farmer suggested the moment of silence over the prayer that Reverend Cox wanted to lead, because some Riders were either agnostic or atheist.

positives and negatives of participating in the CORE initiative. Most privately pondered the events they would encounter, and decided over the few hours whether they were going to show up at the bus terminals. Whether in the group or in private, the Riders reaffirmed the seriousness of the Freedom Ride campaign. They mulled over the intense training they had just finished and the real threat of bodily harm and even death. They fully understood, with the waivers they signed releasing CORE from any liability, the gravity of this Ride. Many completed wills, called family and friends, and spent their last night in a restless sleep contemplating their unpredictable future.

Even Farmer had doubts about how many Riders would show up the next morning. The several calls he received that evening from leaders of other civil rights organizations added to his doubts. While some calls were supportive, one in particular from Roy Wilkins, head of the NAACP and Farmer's former boss, left Farmer nervous. "Wilkins asked somewhat facetiously," Farmer, explained, "if CORE was actually going to go through with its 'joy ride'." Farmer, while annoyed by Wilkins' sarcastic tone, set his pride aside and, reaffirmed CORE and the Riders' commitment to the Freedom Ride initiative.<sup>208</sup> While Farmer presented a strong front, he, as Arsenault explained,

Replayed the evening's events in his mind, [and] began to worry that he had unwittingly sown the seeds of failure with his offer to let the volunteers back out. He was not one to wallow in self-doubt, but this time he could not help but second guess himself. Why hadn't he left well enough alone? Had he come this far only to see his dream dissolve in a torrent of needless panic fostered by his own well-meaning but careless words? What would happen to CORE and the movement if word got out, as it surely would, that the Freedom Riders had lost their nerve? These questions haunted him as he awoke on the most important morning of his life.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 109.

<sup>209</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 109.

The next morning at breakfast, every Rider showed up “prepared,” as Farmer later noted, “for anything, even death.”<sup>210</sup> There was a level of commitment that these men and women had not only to the Freedom Ride initiative, but also to seeing the destruction of, as Arsenault explained, “the hypocrisy and complacency of a nation that refused to enforce its own laws and somehow failed to acknowledge the utter indecency of racial discrimination.”<sup>211</sup>

At the station, the Riders proceeded to divide themselves into two groups, one to ride the Greyhound bus and the other to take the Trailways bus. Before embarking on the Freedom Ride, a few supporters greeted them from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), NAG, and CORE. The calm in the atmosphere was in no way reflective of the gravity of this momentous occasion. The lack of media attention did not discourage Farmer and the Riders. Even though CORE had released a large quantity of press releases about the Freedom Ride initiative, the press coverage did not distract the Riders from their ultimate goal. The absence of banners, protesters, and signs did not lessen the feeling, in the Riders’ mind, that they were about to start a revolution that would change the United States of America. Farmer proceeded to hold a press conference, explaining the philosophy of nonviolent direct action and CORE’s adoption of the “jail-no bail” strategy. “If there is an arrest,” Farmer recalled, “we will accept that arrest. We will not pay fines because we feel that by paying money to a segregated state

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<sup>210</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 109.

<sup>211</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 109.

we would help it perpetuate segregation,” he added, “and if there is violence we will accept that violence without responding in kind.”<sup>212</sup>

Four journalists did agree to accompany the Riders on the initiative. The brave courageous journalists included:

***Charlotte DeVree**—a fifty-one-year-old white New York writer*  
***Simeon Booker**—a forty-three year-old black feature writer for Jet and Ebony magazines*  
***Ted Gaffney**-- a thirty-three-year-old black photographer from Washington<sup>213</sup>*  
***Moses Newsom**—a thirty-four-year-old black editor of the Baltimore Afro-American<sup>214</sup>*

Charlotte Devree, often mistaken as a Freedom Rider, was a freelance writer from New York and a CORE member. Devree wanted to write an accurate account of the ride.<sup>215</sup> Simeon Booker was an experienced journalist as a former Neiman Fellow at Harvard, who understood the racial hostility of the South. Much of his experience and notoriety came from the captivating articles he wrote about the 1955 Emmett Till murder case. Ted Gaffney worked as a part-time freelance journalist and photographer for Johnson Publications. While Gaffney was on the Freedom Ride as a journalist, his personal experience as a Freedom Rider gave him a profound connection with the Riders. Gaffney, fifteen years earlier had, conducted his own test of the Morgan decision while riding on a bus from Washington to Fort Eustis, Virginia. Gaffney, a year before the Journey of Reconciliation, stood his ground with the driver who frequently asked him to

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<sup>212</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 110.

<sup>213</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 110.

<sup>214</sup> Newsom did not depart with the Riders on May 4, but joined the Riders and journalists in Greensboro, North Carolina.

<sup>215</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 110.

move to the rear of the bus. Moses Newson, a journalist for the *Memphis Tri-State Defender*, had the most experience with southern defiance of civil rights. Having covered both the 1956 Clinton, Tennessee, and the 1957 Little Rock Nine school desegregation stories, Newson understood the volatility of the South. Although not Riders themselves, Charlotte DeVree, Simeon Booker, Ted Gaffney, and Moses Newson showed tremendous courage in boarding those buses.<sup>216</sup>

After receiving instructions from Farmer on the proper way to arrange themselves on the busses, the Riders separated, bought their tickets, checked their bags, and boarded the Greyhound and Trailways busses. The pilgrimage through the Deep South started with little fanfare. Fellow passengers and drivers made no physical or verbal objection to the Riders, an unexpected but pleasant surprise, boarding the busses and sitting in the different sections or as interracial pairings on the bus.

Fifty miles south of Washington, D.C., in Fredericksburg, Virginia, the Riders faced the first test of tolerance. A small town known for its Confederate heritage and devotion to racial segregation, Fredericksburg had not complied with the *Boynton* case. The Riders walked into the terminal and encountered, as Gaither's report noted, the "WHITE ONLY" and "COLORED ONLY" signs over the restrooms. But while a few residents had cold stares, "there was no disruption," Lewis later explained, "as we used rest rooms traditionally designated for another race and ordered drinks at a counter that never would have served us before.... [It was as if] they knew we were coming and

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<sup>216</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 110.

baked us a cake.”<sup>217</sup> The reaction of Fredericksburg to the CORE Freedom Ride was a surprise that left the riders perplexed about what to expect for the remainder of the trip.<sup>218</sup>

The Riders boarded the busses to travel to Richmond, their next stop. The Riders would spend a night at Virginia Union College, a black institution close to the bus terminal. After their experience in Fredericksburg, the Riders did not know what to expect, but Farmer anticipated problems in the city that had been the capital of the Confederacy. Compounding this uncertainty was that NAACP leaders had encouraged their members not to show support for the Freedom Ride. Even without local support from the NAACP, the Riders, according to Lewis came across, “No signs, No trouble. Nothing but a few cold stares.”<sup>219</sup> The Riders, without incident, desegregated the Richmond bus terminals, but the success of Fredericksburg and Richmond was bittersweet for Peck. Revisiting the Richmond terminal fourteen years later, Peck knew that the physical signs of Jim Crow segregation were gone, but the psychological mindset of Jim Crow was present. Peck recalled, “It was disheartening to me that in a city such as Richmond, which is not far from the nation’s capital and where the color signs had been removed, Negroes were sticking to the formerly separate and grossly unequal colored waiting rooms and restaurants.”<sup>220</sup> The psychological accommodation to second-class citizenship was still evident in the city of Richmond at the Greyhound and Trailways bus terminals. The power of Jim Crow in Richmond saddened and angered Peck, for he

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<sup>217</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 136.

<sup>218</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 114.

<sup>219</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 140.

<sup>220</sup> Peck, Freedom, 116.

understood that the Freedom Ride would be a hollow victory if black southerners refused to destroy the control Jim Crow had over them.<sup>221</sup>

The next day the Riders boarded the busses and headed for Petersburg. Just twenty miles south of Richmond, Petersburg was a railroad town, 40 percent black, and home of Virginia State University. While Jim Crow segregation existed in Petersburg, when the Riders arrived, they encountered as Gaither explained, “relatively few manifestations of ultra-segregationist extremism.”<sup>222</sup> By the time the Freedom Riders arrived in Petersburg, the Petersburg Improvement Association (PIA) had succeeded in desegregating lunch counters with sit-in demonstrations. The President of the Bus Terminal Restaurants had not only desegregated restaurants in the Petersburg Trailways terminal station but in other cities as well. The PIA had set change in motion nine months before the Freedom Riders ever set foot in Petersburg. Their work, though, helped the Riders to test the Boynton case without serious incident.<sup>223</sup>

The Riders were welcomed with enthusiastic cheers by blacks in the community. Black residents of Petersburg escorted the Riders to cars that awaited to take them to the Bethany Baptist Church, where one of the Riders, Albert Bigelow, would speak that evening. The tiny-red church was bursting with excitement over the Riders and what they had to tell the community. The message, Lewis recalled, was that “no place was too small and no people were too powerless to do what we on the busses were doing.”<sup>224</sup> Bigelow relayed that sentiment with sincerity when he stated that “the Freedom Riders were

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<sup>221</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 114.

<sup>222</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 115.

<sup>223</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 115.

<sup>224</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 116.



committed to not only the fight for equal justice, but also to the redemptive spirit of non-violence.”<sup>225</sup>

The next morning the Riders boarded the busses, happy with their successes thus far, but concerned about their next stop at Farmville. The Riders knew anything was possible in Farmville, the heart of Prince Edward County. The small farming community had showed defiance before with school desegregation in 1959. Instead of integrating the black and white children, the county had closed all public schools. While the white children went to private schools, black children went two years without any type of schooling. This was Farmville’s way to maintain its Massive Resistance campaign.<sup>226</sup>

Without incident, the Riders were served in the terminal, but, Lewis noted later, “we couldn’t help noticing that the ‘WHITE’ and ‘COLORED’ signs at the Farmville terminal had not only not been removed, but they had been freshly painted on our behalf.”<sup>227</sup> The trouble the Freedom Riders thought they were going to encounter did not materialize because the town’s residents did not seem interested in what they were doing. There was little attention given to the Freedom Riders as they “violated” de facto Jim Crow in Farmville, the center of the Massive Resistance in Virginia.<sup>228</sup>

Lynchburg was the next stop in Virginia. The town, one-fifth black in population, was home to Macon’s Woman’s College, Lynchburg College, the Virginia Theological Seminary—a black seminary, and a prosperous tobacco economy. The Riders were confident that the bus terminals would comply with the law because of the town’s

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<sup>225</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 116.

<sup>226</sup> Peck, Freedom, 116.

<sup>227</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 137.

<sup>228</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 117.

positive race relations. The Riders encountered, for the most part, a compliant community. The only physical indication of separation in the Trailways terminal was, as Peck recalled, “a divider in the middle of the counter, making persons on one side virtually invisible to those on the other.”<sup>229</sup>

Divided amongst eight churches that night, the Riders faced a range of reactions to their initiative. From Frances Bergman’s elation at the “warmest reception thus far” to Ben Cox’s uneasiness at Lynchburg’s disturbing strangeness, the black community in Lynchburg perplexed the Riders. Within just two hundred miles, it was clear that there existed a different mindset toward what equality truly meant. Reverend Cox, shocked by the pastor’s acceptance of racial segregation, tried to inspire the congregation to fight against the Jim Crow mentality. The unenthusiastic pastor, Cox recalled, said to the congregation, “If God had wanted us to sit in the front of the bus he would have put us there.” The docility of a leader in the black community became an educational opportunity for those Riders who had limited experience in the South. For Cox, the notion of accommodating to racial injustice was infuriating and unacceptable.<sup>230</sup>

Daville, a mill town south of Lynchburg, was the last stop in Virginia. The Freedom Riders did not know what to expect upon their arrival. At the Greyhound-Trailways terminal, the Riders met with resistance for the first time. The hostility on the part of black and white residents was evident immediately when the Riders stepped off the busses. Ed Blankenheim faced resistance first when a black server refused to wait on him at the “colored counter.” Request after request by Blankenheim went unanswered by

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<sup>229</sup> Peck, Freedom, 117.

<sup>230</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 117 - 118.

the black waiter whose white boss threatened to fire him if he served a white Freedom Rider. Discouraged by the outcome, Blankenheim boarded his bus. When the second bus arrived, an hour-and-a-half later, Genevieve Hughes, Walter Bergman, and James Peck challenged the segregated lunch counters and after a brief discussion with the manager received refreshments.<sup>231</sup>

The first stop in North Carolina was Greensboro, a city with a liberal reputation stemming from the 1960 sit-in campaigns and its voluntary enforcement of the Brown decision. According to Peck, though, Greensboro was “the first city where the color signs started to become the rule,” where “the first greetings to arriving bus passengers are oversized signs all around the building with arrows pointing to the colored waiting room.”<sup>232</sup> What the Freedom Riders did not anticipate in Greensboro was a white community retaliating against a continued militant civil rights movement. The image of Greensboro as the center of the southern civil rights struggle polarized the white community and created a racial backlash against civil rights agitators. As the civil approach to racial integration dissipated in Greensboro, there was a significant rise in white defiance.<sup>233</sup>

The rise in defiance did not discourage the black residents of Greensboro or the Freedom Riders. In large numbers, the black residents came out to Bennett College and Shiloh Baptist Church to hear the Freedom Riders. Farmer spoke at the Shiloh Baptist Church that evening and stressed his devotion to “make segregation so costly the South

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<sup>231</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 118.

<sup>232</sup> Peck, Freedom, 117.

<sup>233</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 118.

can't afford it." He added that, "life is not dear and sweet that we must passively accept Jim Crow and segregation.... If our parents had gone to jail, we wouldn't have to go through the ordeal now. Our nation cannot afford segregation. Overseas it gives Uncle Sam a black eye. Future generations will thank us for what we have done."<sup>234</sup> Farmer, emotionally drained, emphasized to the audience that it would take more than a two-week Freedom Ride and thirteen riders to create lasting change. For any type of substantive change to take place, the black South had to fight with a strong vigor that no white defiance could destroy.

On Monday morning, May 8, the Freedom Riders left Greensboro and headed for Charlotte. Upon their departure, there was heightened apprehension because the Freedom Ride would begin its descent into the Deep South. The Riders, as Peck explained, were "venturing into territory not covered by the 1947 Journey."<sup>235</sup> As the Ride continued, they were unaware of what dangers or successes lay ahead of them.

The "Queen City," Charlotte was known for its textile and banking industry, and it was the largest city in the Carolina Piedmont. Charlotte in 1961 was twenty-eight percent black and committed to segregation along racial lines. Black residents in Charlotte knew their place and understood that serious consequences existed if anyone crossed that racial line. The same indoctrination existed in Charlotte as in Lynchburg because "the immutability of racial segregation," as Arsenault noted, "even in the most

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<sup>234</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 119.

<sup>235</sup> Peck, Freedom, 118.

mundane aspects of life, was a given, and anyone who crossed the color line in Charlotte was asking for trouble.”<sup>236</sup>

Charles Person soon understood the unspoken mentality of Jim Crow in Charlotte. Arriving in Charlotte’s Union Station, as Peck recalled, “He didn’t even think of it as a test. He simply looked at his shoes and thought they needed a shine.”<sup>237</sup> The young Atlanta Rider sat and remained in the whites-only shoeshine chair waiting for service or arrest. Upon arrival of a police officer and the threat of arrest, the Riders decided to replace Person with Joe Perkins in the shoeshine chair. Within minutes, the Charlotte police arrested Perkins on a charge of trespassing. Perkins, the first Freedom Rider arrested was thus able to test the jail-no bail strategy. With his bail set at fifty dollars, Perkins told Ed Blankenheim, the observer for this leg of the Ride, not to pay it. Perkins spent two-nights in city jail before the authorities transferred him to the country jail to await his trial.<sup>238</sup>

Thomas Wyche, a NAACP attorney, represented Perkins before Judge Howard B. Arbuckle. Perkins, Blankenheim, and Wyche were all surprised when Judge Arbuckle, cited the Boynton case, and dismissed the case. Blankenheim and Perkins thus headed victorious for Charlotte’s Union Station, but that victory was short-lived. As they left, they encountered the police officer who had arrested Perkins. He warned them to “get the hell out of town,” because Charlotte was not going to “let no New York nigger come

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<sup>236</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 120.

<sup>237</sup> Peck, Freedom, 118.

<sup>238</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 120 - 121.

down here and make trouble for us and our good nigras.”<sup>239</sup> Ignoring the threat, Blankenheim and Perkins boarded a bus to join their fellow Riders in Rock Hill, the first stop in South Carolina.

Charlotte may have had the first arrest, but as Blankenheim and Perkins soon found out, Rock Hill would be the first town in which the Riders would face serious trouble. The cotton mill town was ripe for a violent confrontation; just three-months prior to the arrival of the Riders, the Rock Hill Movement led by Reverend C.A. Ivory and SNCC volunteers, had enjoyed success with its jail no-bail sit-in campaign and civil rights activism continued to grow amongst the Rock Hill residents. On the other hand, Rock Hill’s white population, or as Senator Ben Tilman referred to them, “the damned factory trash,” was filled with white supremacists who directed their blame for falling cotton prices and the crop lien system toward Rock Hill’s black residents.<sup>240</sup> The racial tension in Rock Hill was so evident that Lewis knew they “were in trouble as soon as I stepped off the bus.”<sup>241</sup>

Lewis, in his 1998 memoir Walking with the Wind, recalled just how much trouble the Riders would face in Rock Hill:

As Al Bigelow and I approached the “WHITE” waiting room in the Rock Hill Greyhound terminal, I noticed a large number of young white guys hanging around the pinball machines in the lobby. Two of these guys were leaning by the doorjamb to the waiting room. They wore leather jackets, had those ducktail haircuts and were each smoking a cigarette. “Other side, nigger,” one of the two said, stepping in my way as I began to walk through the door. He pointed to a door down the way with a sign that said “COLORED.”

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<sup>239</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 121.

<sup>240</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 121.

<sup>241</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 121.

I did not feel nervous at all. I really did not feel afraid.

“I have a right to go in here,” I said, speaking carefully and clearly, “on the grounds of the Supreme Court decision in the Boynton case.”

I don’t think either of these guys had ever heard of the Boynton case. Not that it would have mattered.

“Shit on that,” one of them said.

The next thing I knew, a fist smashed the right side of my head. Then another hit me square in the face. As I fell to the floor, I could feel feet kicking me hard in the sides. I could taste blood in my mouth.

At that point Al Bigelow stepped in, placing his body between mine and these men, standing square, with his arms at his sides.

It had to look strange to these guys to see a big, strong white man putting himself in the middle of a fistfight like this, not looking at all as if he was ready to throw a punch, but not looking frightened either.

They hesitated for an instant. Then they attacked Bigelow, who did not raise a finger as these young men began punching him. It took several blows to drop him to one knee.

At that point, several of the white guys by the pinball machines moved over to join in. Genevieve Hughes stepped in their way and was knocked to the floor.

That finally brought a reaction from a police officer who had stood by and witnessed the entire scene. He stepped in, pulled one guy off us and said, ‘All right, boys. Y’all’ve done about enough now. Get on home.’<sup>242</sup>

Heeding the police officer’s warning, the hoodlums retreated home. Several other officers showed up within minutes and some, to the amazement of Lewis, Hughes, and Bigelow were sympathetic. One officer asked Lewis, Hughes, and Bigelow, if they wanted to press charges. “We said no,” Lewis recalled, “to the offer to press charges. This was simply another aspect of the Gandhian perspective. Our struggle was not against one person or against a small group of people like those who attacked us that morning. The struggle was against a system, the system that helped produce people like that.”<sup>243</sup> Lewis, Hughes, and Bigelow did not look at the young men who attacked them as their enemies, but as victims of a Jim Crow system. The problem of Jim Crow was much

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<sup>242</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 137-138.

<sup>243</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 138.

larger than the attack on Lewis, Hughes, and Bigelow and to bring attention to the attack was, as Lewis recalled, “a distraction, a sideshow that would draw attention away from where it belonged, which in this case was the sanctioned system of segregation in the entire South.”<sup>244</sup> Lewis, Hughes, and Bigelow refused to leave the Rock Hill Terminal. Instead, they joined their fellow riders in the restaurant for what Lewis called “his hard-earned cup of coffee.”<sup>245</sup> The Freedom Riders faced their first test of violence that day and held true to Gandhian principles. More importantly, the attack against Lewis, Hughes, and Bigelow brought larger media attention to the ride and its participants.<sup>246</sup>

The Trailways bus arrived to a locked and closed Rock Hill terminal. While a group of whites loomed around the station and followed the riders to the Friendship Junior College, all of the riders reunited without any violent altercation. While the Riders exchanged stories on the day’s events, a Rock Hill resident mended Lewis and Bigelow’s injuries with Band-Aids from a first-aid-kit.

The next morning the riders returned to an opened Rock Hill bus terminal where they observed, in the white waiting room, as Peck noted, “a test team [sitting] there unmolested.” The Riders could have faced the same violence this day as they had the previous day, but “the hoodlums,” as Peck recalled, did not stage a repeat performance.<sup>247</sup> The Riders’ first major violent confrontation was behind them, but the unforeseen eruption of violence that lay ahead was on the minds of every rider.

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<sup>244</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 138.

<sup>245</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 122.

<sup>246</sup> A small story about the beatings circulated across the wire to several newspapers bringing the extra media attention to the Freedom Ride.

<sup>247</sup> Peck, Freedom, 120.



The Riders arrived to closed signs posted on the doors to the Chester bus terminal.<sup>248</sup> They proceeded on to Winnsboro, where Hank Thomas, the youngest of the riders, along with James Peck waited for service at the whites-only lunch counter. Barely in their seats, Peck recalled that the “restaurant owner dashed away from the counter to call the police.”<sup>249</sup> Upon the officer’s arrival, he directed Thomas to come with him. Peck interceded and indicated, to the police officer, that Thomas had the constitutional right to eat at this lunch counter. The police officer responded to Peck by arresting him for interfering with arrest and Thomas for trespass. While the rest of the Riders headed to Sumter, Frances Bergman, the observer on this leg of the trip, stayed behind with Thomas and Peck. Both men were placed in separate Jim Crow cells for hours while Bergman, as Peck later lamented, “braved the hate-filled town alone trying to find out what the authorities intended to do” with Peck and Thomas.<sup>250</sup> Bergman recalled years later how she was referred to as “nigger lover,” and how she was told to “get out of town” for they had, “no use for her kind here.” She went on to say in a testimonial,

For the first time I felt that I have, a glimpse of what it would be like to be colored. This thing made me realize what it is to be scorned, humiliated and made to feel like dirt.... The whole thing was such an eye-opener for me.... It left me so filled with admiration for the colored people who have to live with this all their lives. It seems to me that anything I can do now, day or night, would be enough.... Somehow, you feel there is a new urgency at this time. You see the courage all about you.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> The media attention gained by the Freedom Ride alerted Southern cities and bus terminals that the Riders were heading their way. Thus, terminals that normally were open, the Riders found closed.

<sup>249</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 125.

<sup>250</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 125.

<sup>251</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 128.

After ten hours in jail, two police officers drove Thomas, in the middle of night, back to the Winnsboro bus terminal. As the police officers drove away, Thomas observed a mob of white segregationists in the parking lot. The white men ordered Thomas “to go into the nigger waiting room.” Thomas, knowing this was a potential lynch mob, defied the order and, with crazy boldness, refused and instead went directly pass the white mob into the white waiting room and purchased a candy bar. Before the white mob could react, Thomas recalled years later, a local black minister screamed out, “get in the car and stay down.” Both men expected “gunshots, but they didn’t come.”<sup>252</sup> Because of the brave actions of the local black community, Thomas escaped a lynch mob waiting to kill him that night. These men and women refused to accept the status quo of Jim Crow. Twenty-five miles later in Columbia and in the safety of a NAACP leader’s home, Thomas recalled, “He saved my life, because they were going to kill me.”<sup>253</sup> Peck’s release was more complicated due to a second arrest for illegal transport of alcohol across the border. Farmer returned from Sumter with Ernest Finney Jr., a local black attorney, to bail Peck out. The second arrest, Farmer recalled, “Delayed one bus for a while. I bailed Jim out, and though knowing my lawyer would have conniptions, I urged him to jump bail so the Freedom Ride could continue on schedule.”<sup>254</sup> Peck complied with Farmer’s request and the men traveled to Sumter to rejoin the other riders. The original charges of trespass and interfering with arrest were dropped because “local officials,” according to

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<sup>252</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 126.

<sup>253</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 126.

<sup>254</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 199.

Peck, apparently concluded that [their] cases would not hold in view of the Supreme's Court's Boynton decision."<sup>255</sup>

Sumter was the last stop in South Carolina, and the Riders tested the facilities with no violent confrontation. After a night in Sumter, the Freedom Ride journeyed to Augusta, Georgia, where the atmosphere was quite civil. All the riders sat in the terminal restaurant and ate, marking the first time that blacks had eaten in Augusta's terminal restaurant. "Our presence," Peck explained, "at the tables drew little attention. Neither racist hoodlums nor mere curiosity seekers gathered."<sup>256</sup> The group sent Herman Harris and Walter Bergman back to the Trailways restaurant that evening to test the facilities again because they were amazed that the same city, which earlier in the year arrested a black soldier for trying to integrate a lunch counter, served them without incident. Harris and Bergman "were served courteously," and with no violent confrontation.<sup>257</sup>

The Riders next tested the Boynton decision in Athens, Georgia. As Peck recalled, "Freedom Riders were served at the lunch counter without question," and he noted that an observer "might have imagined himself in a rest stop up North rather than deep in Georgia."<sup>258</sup> At both the Greyhound and Trailways terminals, the Riders encountered desegregated facilities that heeded the Boynton decision. It was positive proof, for the Riders, that change in the Deep South was possible. The destruction of Jim Crow segregation and implementation of integration was no longer a dream, but a reality

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<sup>255</sup> Peck, Freedom, 122.

<sup>256</sup> Peck, Freedom, 123.

<sup>257</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 132.

<sup>258</sup> Peck, Freedom, 123.

achieved. Leadership was a key component in why the Riders did not encounter any violent confrontations in Sumter, Augusta, Athens, and Atlanta.<sup>259</sup>

The Riders stayed in Atlanta for two days before heading into Alabama. While in Atlanta, the riders stayed in the Atlanta University dorms and met with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who resided in Atlanta. During a dinner with King, the Riders described in detail what they had encountered. King took this opportunity to emphasize the importance of nonviolent direct action and his elation over the successes gained thus far in the Freedom Ride. In a private conversation with Simeon Booker, the journalist from *Jet* and *Ebony*, King confided, “You will never make it through Alabama.”<sup>260</sup> Sources in King’s SCLC organization were privy to evidence suggesting a plot to derail the Freedom Ride.<sup>261</sup>

The ultra-segregationist front in Alabama did not hide the fact it was devoted to the Jim Crow mentality. From the police sergeant to the governor, their racial hatred was clear. Governor Patterson, a year before the Freedom Rides, had even predicted that “you’re going to have rioting on your hands if they try forced integration,” he added and elaborated that “I’ll be one of the first ones stirring up trouble, any way I can.”<sup>262</sup> Alabama was not willing to comply with any law that went against the old tradition of the color

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<sup>259</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 131- 132.

<sup>260</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 133.

<sup>261</sup> Farmer later confirmed King’s speculation in a conversation with Booker. He was informed of the plot, and, alarmed; he did ask Jimmy McDonald and Genevieve Hughes to forgo the remainder of the ride. Farmer was concerned that McDonald would break with the nonviolent direct action strategy, and Hughes could ignite greater violence because of whites being threatened by interracial dating and marriage. McDonald and Hughes refused and remained with the Freedom Ride.

<sup>262</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 136.

line. The Freedom Riders were venturing into this deep southern defiance environment willing to face all challenges.

Unbeknownst to the Riders, the Alabama Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were constructing a plan to deal with the Freedom Riders when they hit the Alabama border. Provided with information from the Birmingham Police Department, Sergeant Tom Cook, Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene “Bull” Connor, and a group of ultra-segregationist Klansmen devised a plan to disrupt the Freedom Ride initiative and maintain white supremacy in Alabama. The plan called for, as Arsenault explained, “a rude welcome for the invading ‘niggers’ and ‘nigger lovers’ who were about to violate the timeworn customs and laws of the sovereign state of Alabama.”<sup>263</sup> Cook and Gary Thomas Rowe, an Eastview Klavern #13 member and FBI informant, developed the violent attack against the Freedom Riders in several meetings. Rowe collected and turned over information to the Birmingham FBI office that indicated Cook, along with, members of the Birmingham Police Department and officials of the Alabama Highway Patrol would cooperate in the attack. “You will work with me and I will work with you on the Freedom Riders,” Cook guaranteed “We’re going to allow you fifteen minutes.... You can beat ’em, bomb ’em, maim ’em, kill ’em. I don’t give a shit. There will be absolutely no arrests. You can assure every Klansman in the country that no one will be arrested in Alabama for that fifteen minutes.”<sup>264</sup> Rowe reported to his Birmingham FBI contacts all the information collected at these planning meetings. J. Edgar Hoover, FBI director, had many opportunities to forewarn Farmer and the Riders, but instead “instructed the

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<sup>263</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 136.

<sup>264</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 136.

Birmingham field office to use care in furnishing information to the Birmingham police department, and discretion in its contacts with Bull Connor and Tom Cook in light of Cook's contacts with Rowe."<sup>265</sup> The FBI took an idle stance, even with the damaging evidence, against the perpetrators of this violent plot. Hoover had a clear idea that these Klansmen, with the help of the local authority, planned "to beat the Freedom Riders into submission."<sup>266</sup> He knew that the Warrior Klavern planned to place three Klansmen on one of the busses in Atlanta. He was privy to the press release drafted by Bobby Shelton, the Imperial Wizard of the Alabama Knights, who stated that, "it was up to the constituted authorities of Alabama to stop any demonstrations by CORE, but if state authorities did not do their duty, the Alabama Knights, KKK Inc. would do all they could to force the CORE representatives to leave Alabama."<sup>267</sup> Nine days before the vigilante attack against the Freedom Riders took place; Hoover knew the details of the plan and conveyed some of Rowe's assessment to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Deputy Attorney General Byron White, and other Justice Department officials. Even with this partial information, Kennedy, White, and the other officials in the Justice Department did not inform the Freedom Riders. The lack of "special instructions" by the Justice Department was the official reason given for the negligence of the Federal government in Alabama.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 136.

<sup>266</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 137.

<sup>267</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 137.

<sup>268</sup> In his lack of action, J. Edgar Hoover exposed his contempt for civil rights. In just collecting the facts from Rowe and not putting in place measures to stop the attack, Hoover assisted the ultra-segregationists in their brutal assault on the Freedom Riders.

Unaware of the plan, when the Riders returned to the dorms that evening they went over the next phase of the Freedom Ride. This final briefing set in place, as Farmer recalled, “The division of responsibilities for the most ominous leg of the journey, the ride through Alabama.”<sup>269</sup> Being the National Director of CORE, Farmer stressed he would be lead tester on the Trailways bus, and James Peck would be the tester on the Greyhound bus. It was imperative that, as Farmer explained, “Discipline and compliance be strict and tight.”<sup>270</sup> There was no room for error as the Riders entered Alabama. Alabama was the prime opportunity, even with the frightening challenges awaiting them, for the Riders to highlight to the world nonviolent direct action.

Farmer never did get the chance to lead the Riders into Alabama. Several hours after the group adjourned their meeting, Farmer received a telephone call from his mother telling him of his father’s death. In his 1985 memoir Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement, Farmer remembered the last conversation he and his father had:

Ten days earlier, during the training session in Washington, D.C., my father lay in a bed at Freedman’s Hospital, in serious condition with medical complications following surgery to remove a cancerous growth on the tongue.... He thought long and hard, probably recalling his own childhood and youth growing up in South Carolina and Georgia, sixty to seventy years ago. Finally, he looked at me through eyes dulled by strong pain killers and dimmed by the knowledge of his own terminal illness. He said, Well, son, I think you will be all right through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and maybe even Georgia. But in ‘Bama, they will doubtless take a potshot at you. With all my heart, I hope they miss. Can you leave a copy of your itinerary? I complied. Son I wish you wouldn’t go. But at the same time, I am more proud than I have ever been in my life, because you are going. Please try to survive.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 200.

<sup>270</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 200.

<sup>271</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 201.

Farmer's mother requested that her son come home immediately to help bury her husband, his father.<sup>272</sup> When making the decision to return home, Farmer confessed he could not "really explain the confusion of emotions. There was of course, the incomparable sorrow and pain, but, frankly, there was also a sense of reprieve, for which I hated myself. Like everyone else, I was afraid of what lay in store for us in Alabama, and now that I was to be spared participation in it, I was relieved, which embarrassed me to tears."<sup>273</sup> Farmer, exhausted and ashamed, informed the Riders of his immediate departure to Washington the next morning at breakfast. He named Joe Perkins as lead tester on the Greyhound bus, and put Jim Peck in charge of the Ride. Farmer emphasized that he could be reached by phone at anytime. Bewildered by Farmer's announcement, the Riders were at a loss for words and worried what lay ahead of a leaderless Freedom Ride.<sup>274</sup>

On May 14, 1961, Mother's Day, the Freedom Riders boarded their respective busses, and due to time schedules, left an hour apart from each other. Both busses headed for Anniston, Alabama, and then for Birmingham. While there was a high level of apprehension, the Riders remained determined to end Jim Crow segregation in Alabama.

As the Greyhound bus entered the Anniston station, the carnage began with a mob of fifty white men greeting the Freedom Riders with ball bats, clubs, and iron pipes.

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<sup>272</sup> Farmer's mother later told him that she believed her husband willed his self to live until the eve of his son heading into Alabama. Each day Farmer's father looked at the itinerary too see where his son was. On the night before Farmer was to leave for Alabama, he received the call about his father's death.

<sup>273</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 201.

<sup>274</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 135.



With no police in sight, the mob led by William Chappell, Klan leader, “set upon the vehicle,” according to Peck, “denting the sides, breaking windows, and slashing tires.”<sup>275</sup> The Riders remained on the bus while watching the mob intensify its efforts to get on the bus or lure the Riders off the bus. As Genevieve Hughes recalled, “One man stood on the steps, yelling, and calling us cowards.”<sup>276</sup> For nearly twenty minutes, the brutal assault on the bus continued before the police arrived. Upon their arrival, no arrests occurred, and the bus driver used a path created for him to leave the station. Escorted by an Anniston police car and followed by the mob, the damaged Greyhound bus made its way to the city limits. Deserting the bus at the city limits, the police car returned to Anniston, and the Freedom Riders found themselves facing another violent attack by the mob. The second attack tested the Riders’ commitment to the Freedom Ride initiative and nonviolent direct action. Lewis, though not there, recounted the vile nature of the attack:

The mob arrived, two hundred of them, circling the bus and smashing the windows. They tugged at the door, which had been pulled shut. They screamed at the riders, who were sprawled on the floor of the bus, avoiding the flying glass. Then someone in the crowd hurled a firebomb, a Molotov cocktail, through the back window. As thick smoke and flames began to fill the bus, the riders rushed the door and found they couldn’t open it. The mob now pushing the door shut, trapping the people inside. At that point, a passenger in the front of the bus pulled a pistol and waved it at the crowd outside. He was a white man, Eli Cowling. He was an Alabama state investigator who had been traveling undercover to keep an eye on the riders. Now it was no longer a priority for him to keep his identity secret. His life was on the line along with everyone else’s on that bus. The crowd backed off. Out the emergency exit door, led by Al Bigelow, tumbled the riders, choking and coughing. One by one they fell to the grass, the last one climbing out just as the bus was rocked by a blast—the fuel tank exploding. Now the mob moved in... . Henry Thomas was clubbed as he staggered away from the bus; somebody swung a baseball bat into the side of his head. Genevieve Hughes had

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<sup>275</sup> Peck, Freedom, 125.

<sup>276</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 143.

her lip split open. Rocks and bricks were heaved from people in the crowd too afraid to come closer.<sup>277</sup>

For the first time, the Freedom Riders faced the intensified violence of the South and feared for their lives. “I got real scared,” Hank Thomas revealed later, “... the bus caught afire and everything got out of control. There was a possibility I could have survived the mob, but I was just so afraid of the mob that I was gonna stay on that bus. I mean, I just got that much afraid.”<sup>278</sup>

The Freedom Riders survived that day, no thanks to the local authorities. Aware of the imminent dangers that still existed in Anniston, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, the pastor of Birmingham’s Bethel Baptist Church, led a convoy of cars into Anniston to transport the Riders back to Birmingham. Shuttlesworth emphasized to the volunteers that this convoy had to be nonviolent, “Gentlemen, this is dangerous,” he explained, “but... you mustn’t carry any weapons. You must trust God and have faith.”<sup>279</sup> Out of respect for Shuttlesworth, the men agreed, but once out of Shuttlesworth’s sight, the “deacons” did not rely on their faith, but the shotguns and ammunition they hid under their seats. The convoy arrived to find the police holding back a hostile white mob. The “deacons” promptly displayed their weapons, the ones they were encouraged not to bring, as they loaded the physically and emotionally wounded Freedom Riders into the cars.

The defenders of white supremacy’s heinous and unprovoked attack against the Freedom Riders in Anniston were brutal and unjust, but the Riders remained firm in their

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<sup>277</sup> Lewis and D’Orso, Walking, 141.

<sup>278</sup> Hank Thomas, in Howell Raines “My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered,” (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977).

<sup>279</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 148.

stance against Jim Crow. The second round of attacks began when the Trailways bus was still in Atlanta. Peck and the other riders noticed regular passengers getting out of line as a group of white men spoke with them. Not putting much thought in it, Peck along with the Bergmans, Person, Harris, Moore, Reynolds, and three of the white men from the group boarded the bus.<sup>280</sup> Shortly after leaving the station the three men revealed their true identity and agenda, and the experience became, as Booker later explained, “a frightening experience... the worst encountered in almost 20 years of journalism.”<sup>281</sup> Yelling “you niggers will be taken care of once you get in Alabama,” the Klansmen continued to make racial slurs and threats in hopes of intimidating the Riders. While the Riders remained in their seats, not breaking with their integrated seating, they did become alarmed as they approached Anniston and the threats intensified.<sup>282</sup>

Unaware of what happened in Anniston the hour before, Peck and his fellow Riders went into “an eerily quiet” Trailways station. Peck, as lead tester, followed protocol, walked to the lunch counter, and purchased some sandwiches. While waiting for the bus to leave, still unaware of the brutal attack earlier, the Riders heard an ambulance but did not give it much thought. The nervous anxiety and uneasiness of the Riders soon changed to heightened fear. The Riders found out the direct connection they had to the ambulance siren when John Olan Patterson, the bus driver, explained, “we have received word that a bus has been burned to the ground and passengers are being carried to the hospital by the carloads.” Patterson, who was no fan of the Riders, further

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<sup>280</sup> Also on board were Simeon Booker and Ted Gaffney.

<sup>281</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 149.

<sup>282</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 149.

declared, “A mob is waiting for our bus and will do the same to us unless we get these niggers off the front seats.”<sup>283</sup> Holding steadfast, the Riders did not move and reminded Patterson that they had the constitutional right to sit anywhere on the bus. Disgusted by the Freedom Riders’ clear defiance, the Klansmen took action and said: “Niggers get back. You ain’t up north. You’re in Alabama, and niggers ain’t nothing here.” Then without provocation one of the Klansmen struck Person in the face and another hit Harris. Dragging both men into the aisle the Klansmen viciously beat Person and Harris, but both men refused to strike back and kept with the Gandhian principle of nonviolence. When Peck and Walter Bergman tried to intercede, the Klansmen turned their attention toward the two white men. Both Peck and Bergman received violent blows to the head that knocked the men to their knees. Peck recalled years later:

I found myself face downward on the floor of the bus. Someone was on top of me. I was bleeding. Bergman’s jaw was cut and swollen. None of us realized that he also had received a crushing blow on the head... Finally, all of our group—whites and Negroes—and one Negro passenger who had not gotten off, had been forced to the back of the bus. The hoodlums—along with a pregnant woman whom they brought aboard—sat in the very front. The seats in between remained empty. At that point, the driver agreed to proceed to Birmingham. Some of us doubted whether he would really head there or turn up some obscure side road for another mob scene. For the entire two-hour ride to Birmingham, the hoodlums craned their necks to make sure we didn’t move into any of the empty rows of front seats.<sup>284</sup>

In direct violation of the Riders civil rights, the Klansmen reestablished Jim Crow segregation on the Trailways bus. With this restored order in place, Patterson—along with a police officer boarded the bus. The police officer revealed his elation at the melee that had taken place, and confirmed to the assailants they did not have “worry about no

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<sup>283</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 149.

<sup>284</sup> Peck, Freedom, 127.

lawsuits. I ain't seen a thing.”<sup>285</sup> Once the police officer vacated the bus, Patterson started the two-hour drive to Birmingham, also content with the new seating arrangement. The Klansmen continued to taunt the beaten Riders over the course of the bus ride. Between the bodily and psychological threats, the Riders thought it best not to test the Morgan or Boynton decision. Simeon Baker, one of the journalists, recalled that one of the hoodlums—blocking passage from the back of the bus to the front—taunted the Riders with: “Just tell Bobby [Kennedy] and we’ll do him in, too.”<sup>286</sup>

Severely beaten and scared, the Riders maintained their commitment to the Freedom Ride and to nonviolence. Not knowing what to expect when they arrived in Birmingham, Peck and Person agreed they would be the first to face any white supremacist mob. The men and women fully understood, now, that they were no longer in the South anymore, but in the Deep South in Alabama—the heart of a southern defiance that had every intent of staying unmovable. These men were proud of, “Every channel of communication,” as the New York Times journalist Harrison Salisbury noted, “every medium of mutual interest, every reasoned approach, every inch of middle ground [being] fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism, reinforced by the whip, the razor, the gun, the bomb, the torch, the club, the knife, the police and many branches of the state apparatus.”<sup>287</sup>

As the bus made its way to Birmingham, the white mob, positioned at the Greyhound station, regrouped and headed to the Trailways station to “welcome” their

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<sup>285</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 150.

<sup>286</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 150-151.

<sup>287</sup> Harrison Salisbury, “Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham,” New York Times, April 12, 1960.

northern agitators. “We made an astounding sight,” Rowe recalled, “men running and walking down the streets of Birmingham on Sunday afternoon carrying chains, sticks, and clubs. Everything was deserted; no police officers were to be seen except one on a street corner. He stepped off and let us go by, and we barged into the bus station and took it over like an army of occupation. There were Klansmen in the waiting room, in the rest rooms, in the parking area.”<sup>288</sup> These men positioned themselves to ambush the Freedom Riders and carry out their elaborate plan of protecting the Jim Crow South. The bus arrived in Birmingham at 4:15 in the afternoon. The Freedom Riders entered a quiet, rather peaceful station, and proceeded to test the facilities. Peck and Person were first to enter the white waiting room. Both men moved towards the whites-only lunch counter and within seconds, the mob began to strike Person in his face. When Peck tried to intervene, the mob, according to Peck, “grabbed [both men] and pushed [them] towards the alleyway leading to the loading platform. As soon as we got into the alleyway and out of sight of onlookers—mainly reporters—in the waiting room, six of them started swinging at me with fists and pipes. Five others attacked Person a few feet ahead.”<sup>289</sup> While Person was able to escape the pummeling of his attackers, Peck was not as lucky. The continued blows Peck received left him unconscious in a pool of his own blood. While Peck and Person endured the wrath of the segregationist mob, the other Freedom Riders and journalists avoided the onslaught of violence. A couple lost themselves in the crowd of passengers in the station, while others boarded the city bus or found a cabdriver willing to take them to a safe location. Walter Bergman and Ike Reynolds were not so

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<sup>288</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 153.

<sup>289</sup> Peck, Freedom, 128.

lucky and could not escape the white mob. Both men received blows from the enraged white men that left them either unconscious or semiconscious. The peaceful, rather quiet station that the Riders entered had become a war zone filled with hateful unlawful violence. For fifteen minutes, the Riders faced the wrath of Southern Defiance unwilling to give up their way of life. These men wanted to annihilate these northern agitators and thus send a message to the world that racial segregation was forever intact in Alabama.<sup>290</sup>

Once the violent attack was over, the Freedom Riders made their way to the parsonage at Bethel Baptist Church. Visibly weakened, frightened, and discouraged by the mob attack, Peck, in his leadership role, tried to lift the spirits of the Riders. Peck and the Riders knew that a serious conversation on the future of the Freedom Ride needed to take place, but it would have to wait because of Peck's dire physical condition. After emergency surgery at Jefferson Hillman Hospital, to repair the wounds he had sustained, reporters surrounded Peck looking for an exclusive interview. While weak from the surgery, Peck welcomed the reporters and recounted for them the vicious events that took place in Anniston and Birmingham. In a soft voice, he told the nation, "The going is getting rougher," but he vowed, "I'll be on that bus tomorrow headed for Montgomery."<sup>291</sup> With that brief statement, Peck revealed the courage and determination possessed by all the Freedom Riders. These men and women, who had suffered physical and emotional wounds in Anniston and Birmingham that day, remained loyal to the Freedom Ride movement. They were willing not only to continue the fight for justice in

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<sup>290</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 154-158.

<sup>291</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 160.

the Deep South, but also to sacrifice their lives to, as Arsenault stated, “redeem the land of Jim Crow.”<sup>292</sup>

That evening, Fred Shuttlesworth held a mass meeting at the Bethel Baptist church, and those who were there heard the firsthand accounts of what had happened at the bus stations. The Riders implored the men and women to join this movement and not passively accept second-class citizenship. Shuttlesworth ended the night with an inspiring sermon about the event of the day. In which, he declared, “this is the greatest thing that has ever happened to Alabama, and it has been good for the nation. It was a wonderful thing to see these young students—Negro and white—come, even after the mobs and the bus burning. When white and black men are willing to be beaten up together, it is a sure sign they will soon walk together as brothers.... No matter how many times they beat us up, segregation has still got to go. Others may be beaten up, but freedom is worth anything.”<sup>293</sup>

Staff members and Freedom Riders informed Farmer of the melee that had erupted in Anniston and Birmingham. Initially plagued with a mixture of emotions from pride in the Freedom Riders to guilt for not being physically there, Farmer set aside his feelings and used the violent outbreak to bring attention to the Freedom Ride. “When I saw the photograph of the burning bus on the front page of the *Washington Post*,” Farmer recalled, “I called my staff in New York and directed them to superimpose that photograph on the flame of the torch of the Statue of Liberty immediately and to use that

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<sup>292</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 161.

<sup>293</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 161.



composite picture as the symbol of the Freedom Ride.”<sup>294</sup> Farmer wanted the nation to see what one American was capable of doing to another American. Farmer, still dealing with the death of his father and his mother’s grief, did not return to the Freedom Riders until Tuesday, so he sent Gordon Carey down to evaluate the situation. Farmer, after receiving press reports, firsthand accounts from Freedom Riders, and Shuttlesworth, faced the agony of whether to end or continue the Freedom Ride. He, along with the Riders, understood that more violence was a possibility and, after serious debate, Farmer decided to end the Freedom Ride. While Farmer was reluctant to make this decision, he wanted to protect the Riders from any further violence. While some Riders agreed with Farmer, in a vote, the overwhelming majority voted to continue the ride. Peck, the most severely beaten, led the charge to continue. “To back down at this juncture,” Peck recalled years later, would “be interpreted as meaning that violence had triumphed over nonviolence. It might convince the ultarsegregationists that by violence they could stop the Freedom Riders. My point was accepted and we started our meeting to plan the next lap, from Birmingham to Montgomery. We decided to leave in one contingent on a Greyhound bus leaving at three in the afternoon.”<sup>295</sup>

The Riders not only regained the spirit needed in order to finish what they had started, but also they inspired others to get involved. Diane Nash, a leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Nashville, expressed the same sentiment as the Riders after hearing about the violent attack against them. In a phone call to Farmer,

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<sup>294</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 203.

<sup>295</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 166.

Diane extended her help with the Freedom Ride. Years later, Farmer recalled the conversation with Diane:

Diane: Your group of Freedom Riders are so badly chewed up that they cannot go on now. Would you have any objections to members of the Nashville Student Movement going in and taking up the Ride where CORE left off.

Farmer: You realize it may be suicide

Diane: We fully realize that but we can't let them stop us with violence. If we do, the movement is dead. Whenever we start a drive, all they will have to do is roll in the violence and we will turn over and play dead. Your group has been battered; let me send in fresh nonviolent troops to carry the Ride on. Let me bring in Nashville students to pick up the baton and run with it.<sup>296</sup>

On Monday, May 15, the Riders received a call from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. They emphasized to the Attorney General the seriousness of the situation; Simeon Booker recalled he told Kennedy, "We are trapped."<sup>297</sup> Shuttlesworth echoed Booker's concerns to Kennedy. Upon hearing what the Riders, Booker and Shuttlesworth had to say, Kennedy arranged for the local police to provide protection for the Freedom Riders. Kennedy declared, "Mr. Connor is going to protect you at the station and escort you to the city line."<sup>298</sup>

Even with a heavier presence of media, Klansmen were still lurking around the bus station, thus establishing a high probability of a repeat attack. Whether or not

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<sup>296</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 203.

<sup>297</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 168.

<sup>298</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 168.

Kennedy came through with police protection for the Riders, the group decided at a morning meeting that they would board the three o'clock bus headed for Montgomery. The Riders were willing to gamble that a repeat attack would not take place because of the media attention now surrounding the Freedom Ride. Upon arrival, the Riders found that a white mob as well as, police and media, were there in full force. As the Riders made their way to the door, Klansmen tried to prevent them from entering, but the police kept the mob from not allowing the Riders to pass. With the mob yelling racial epithets and screaming threats, the Riders proceeded to the ticket counter and purchased their tickets to Montgomery.

The Riders went into the waiting room to wait for a boarding announcement, but the announcement would never come. Instead, the Riders found themselves in a stalemate with Governor Patterson, Eugene "Bull" Connor, and the mob of Klansmen. The Governor, ignoring the directive of the attorney general, declared, "The citizens of the state are so enraged that I cannot guarantee protection for this bunch of rabble-rousers."<sup>299</sup> Eugene "Bull" Connor mirrored this sentiment when he added, "I have said for the last twenty years that these out-of-town meddlers were going to cause bloodshed if they kept meddling in the South's business."<sup>300</sup> The disdain for the Riders that Patterson and Connor expressed was clear. Their defiance of the Justice Department infuriated Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who demanded that they protect the Riders, these men and women who "under the law were entitled to transportation by the

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<sup>299</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 170.

<sup>300</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 171.

Greyhound bus.”<sup>301</sup> Kennedy emphasized that “the Government [was] going to be very upset if this group did not get to continue their trip [because] we’ve gone to a lot of trouble to see that they [CORE Freedom Riders] get to [take] this trip.”<sup>302</sup> Kennedy’s request fell on deaf ears in Alabama and thus his frustration with Jim Crow and Alabama’s defiance only escalated throughout the day. His frustration culminated when he warned George Cruik, the manager of the Birmingham Greyhound bus station, “... Somebody better get in the damn bus and get it going and get these people on their way.”<sup>303</sup> Even with this warning and the threat to send in an Air Force plane for the Riders, the Freedom Riders remained in the waiting room of the Greyhound station with no way to Montgomery. With no end in sight for the impasse, the Riders discussed whether it wise to continue this stalemate. The Riders concluded that to preserve the Freedom Ride they had to break the stalemate and continue to Montgomery or New Orleans by plane. The Riders wanted to avoid further bloodshed for themselves and the black community in Birmingham. After several hours of phoned-in bomb threats, flight cancellations, and a heated debate over whether to continue to Montgomery or New Orleans, the Freedom Plane left at 10:58 P.M. for New Orleans.

Years later James Farmer recalled,

When the courageous band of thirteen had met in Washington, D.C., at the end of April, I had not dreamed that in a few short weeks a new kind of civil war would rock the nation—a war not “without violence,” but with violence on only one side. We had not dreamed that Jim Crow would so

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<sup>301</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 171.

<sup>302</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 171.

<sup>303</sup> Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 171.

quickly be stood on its head and its supporters driven into trenches in a do-or-die battle to save it. But so it was.<sup>304</sup>

The Freedom Riders throughout the initiative, as Meier and Rudwick noted, “Insisted upon their rights to use waiting rooms and lunch counters, and successfully challenged-- even with the threat of violence and arrest--, the segregation that still prevailed despite the Boynton decision.”<sup>305</sup> Determined to change society, the Freedom Riders put their lives on the line. White and black men and women worked together testing laws and demanding equal treatment for all citizens. They wanted an integrated society that was willing to end discriminating aggression and become a truly democratic country. The Freedom Riders did not complete their journey to New Orleans on the bus, but their ride catapulted CORE, the drive to end racial segregation, and nonviolent action to the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement. Sadly, the same organization that had devoted itself to the principle of nonviolent action and integration in seven short years would turn its back on that philosophy. The voluntary or forced removal of white members from CORE in 1968 left an organization that was strikingly different from the CORE represented by the Freedom Riders in 1961.

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<sup>304</sup> Farmer, Lay Bare, 204.

<sup>305</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 137.

WE'RE SICK AND TIRED OF BEING SICK AND TIRED: THE TRANSITIONAL  
CORE YEARS 1960-1966

Bayard Rustin recalled:

...in the few years that have passed since the first flush of sit-ins, several developments have taken place that have complicated matters [the civil rights movement]... [one] is the spread of the revolution to the North; and [another] is the expansion of the movement's base in the Negro community.<sup>306</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's was going through a physical and ideological change. It was no longer the movement that focused on voter registration and the integration of lunch counters, but rather began to concentrate on housing, school integration/better-educational opportunities, police protection, and employment; all social issues that affected the northern "urban black belts." Participants in the movement found very little solace in destroying Jim Crow and gaining legal access to public accommodations, which they "lacked money [and opportunity] to use." The vision of the movement had to go beyond just race relations, but there was an understanding in the 1960's of the significance of economic relations.

From a constitutional standpoint blacks gained tremendous ground in the ten years that followed the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas decision. Even though Jim Crow was on the decline blacks still suffered from the persistence of de facto

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<sup>306</sup> Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," in Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, editors, Time on Two Crosses: the Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin, (California: Cleis Press, 2003), 117.

segregation in socioeconomic institutions. Civil rights organizations were slow to realize, as Bayard Rustin noted that:

More Negroes are unemployed today than in 1954, and the unemployment gap between the races is wider. More Negroes attend de facto segregated schools today than when the Supreme Court handed down its famous decision, while school integration proceeds at a snail's pace in the south, the number of Northern schools with an excessive proportion of minority youth proliferates. And behind this is the continuing growth of racial slums, spreading over our central cities and trapping Negro youth in a milieu which, whatever its legal definition, sows an unimaginable demoralization. ... These are the facts of life which generate frustration in the Negro community and challenge the civil rights movement. At issue, after all, is not civil rights strictly speaking, but social and economic conditions.<sup>307</sup>

Blacks were fighting not just for equality through the movement, but for a social and economic way of life. The civil rights movement was evolving into a social movement that challenged the barriers to full opportunities and real equality. The CORE of the 1960's began to recognize this evolution of the civil rights movement and found it fundamentally changing as well. The 1960's for CORE was a watershed era that established new leaders, directives, and ideologies for the organization. This change created a division of goals for CORE as a whole, with the southern chapters focusing on voter registration, while the northern chapters turned their attention to the socioeconomic plight of the urban black poor and the ghettos they inhabited. The northern black was "stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before: automation, urban decay, de facto school segregation;" none of these issues disappeared with the demise of Jim Crow.<sup>308</sup> What became apparent in the North was that

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<sup>307</sup> Carbado and Weise, Time on Two Crosses, 118.

<sup>308</sup> Carbado and Weise, Time on Two Crosses, 121.

employment and housing initiatives could not rely solely, as Farmer noted at the 1961 Convention, “on sympathy with the South.”<sup>309</sup>

While the national office recognized that an aggressive direct action campaign was needed to attack the problems of the urban black ghettos, applying civil disobedience to northern initiatives was complicated. Local northern chapters, which would initiate these campaigns, had not developed the techniques needed to insure success within their communities. Complicating this issue was the important struggle that existed, as Sam Kushner, a Los Angeles CORE member, noted, “between those who wanted more militancy... more picketing, and another group who wanted CORE to follow ‘CORE steps’ of careful and long-drawn out negotiation.”<sup>310</sup>

Farmer even emphasized that CORE had “not yet devised enough techniques or used enough imagination “to eliminate discrimination in the North.”<sup>311</sup>

Northern CORE chapters remained steadfast in their opposition to discriminatory practices in housing, employment, and education within their communities, but they lacked the “methods, procedures, and examples of attack,” or as Genevieve Hughes of the Berkeley CORE chapter noted, they “lacked an action orientation.”<sup>312</sup> A leader in Boston CORE commented: “At the moment we have no employment project. We are in the process of making a decision to concern ourselves—the exact nature of our commitment

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<sup>309</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968, ( New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 182.

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Sam Kushner, December 1965 in August Meier Papers at Schomburg Center, New York Public Library. Hereafter referred to as August Meier Papers.

<sup>311</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 182.

<sup>312</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 183.



is not yet clear....”<sup>313</sup> The absence of a sound tactical approach diminished the self-confidence needed to fight northern discrimination. In the winter and summer of 1961, national CORE set up training workshops and conferences in California to combat this issue within northern local chapters, and followed these programs up with employment and housing institutes in Ohio in 1962.

These workshops along with trial-and-error campaigns on the part of northern chapters led to the emergence of useful tactical approaches to confronting discrimination in employment and housing.

Some of these tactics involved direct action platforms, while others, though more subtle in action, were still very effective. Seattle and Long Island CORE chapters circulated lists of white neighborhoods that sold homes to buyers without regard to race. This action helped many middle-class black families to buy homes in all-white communities. A more direct action approach, used by Los Angeles and Philadelphia CORE chapters, was “Operation Windowshop” in which groups of blacks took tours of model homes in suburban housing developments. This tactic, even though widely tried in northern chapters, proved to be unsuccessful because of the hesitancy of black families to move to predominantly white neighborhoods. Both the Syracuse and Philadelphia chapters found that,

Our CORE complainants were very few, just a handful and mostly people looking for a halfway decent row house on the fringes of the ghetto. We always suggest that they go and look at the new developments in the Northeast (which is 100% white), but only one or two have gone up there. We tried to conduct an ‘Operation

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<sup>313</sup> 1961 Convention, Oldham Prs; Tony Salotto to Carey [Spring 1961], CORE Archives; Genevieve Hughes, Report, Dec. 1961, CORE Archives; Boston CORE Report [ca. Feb. 1962], CORE Archives in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 183.

Windowshop' through the churches, NAACP, etc., but were totally unsuccessful. In about four Sundays, we got about five carloads of onlookers.”<sup>314</sup>

Sit-ins and picketing were two direct action methods used in housing initiatives in 1961.

Both Brooklyn and New York CORE chapters used the direct action of a sit-in on July 4, 1961, at a Brooklyn rental office and met with success when they acquired an apartment for a black Brooklyn resident. Brooklyn CORE continued its use of direct action with sit-ins at Lefrak Realty Company and the Ira Management Corporation in October 1961.

Both sit-ins generated a large turnout of participants willing to picket these establishments in order to desegregate white apartment complexes. While the Lefrak Realty Company sit-in climaxed with an eighteen-hour standoff and Ira Management Corporation a twenty-five hour standoff, the most intense Brooklyn CORE housing sit-in was a seventeen-day “dwell-in” in which members brought “card tables, sleeping mats and other furniture into an apartment at a development that refused to rent to a black IBM supervisor.”<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> On Long Island, see Long Island CORE Report to 1962 Convention, CORE Archives; *Times*, Aug. 7, Oct. 11, 1962; Brooklyn *Amsterdam News*, Aug. 11, 1962. On Seattle, see Joan Singler to Carey, Aug. 6, 1962, CORE Archives. On Philadelphia, see *Tribune*, May 26, 1962; Elizabeth Lynes to Rich, July 9, 1962, CORE Archives; Philadelphia CORE Report to 1962 Convention, UC, and quote from William Fisher to Rich, June 27, 1962, CORE Archives. Los Angeles, see Los Angeles CORE Report to 1962 Convention, UC, and Sentinel, July 19, 1962. On Syracuse, see Alice Tait to McCain, [April 1962], Archives in Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 184.

<sup>315</sup> *CORE-lator*, August and December 1961; “Lefrak Report,” December 1961, CORE Archives; leaflet, “End Discrimination in Housing by the Lefrak Organization” [1962], Ollie Leeds Prs; *Times*, October 5 & 7, 1961; *Brooklyn Amsterdam News*, October 14, November 25, 1961, December 22& 29, 1962; press release, December 20, 1962; *Brooklyn CORE North Star*, December 1962, Leeds Prs., in Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 185.

With the success of Brooklyn CORE's direct action sit-ins, other northern chapters followed suit beginning in the winter of 1962. Chapters in Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, Washington, New Jersey and Syracuse applied the sit-in technique to gain equality in housing for middle-class blacks in the early 1960's. The predominantly white chapter of Ann Arbor, Michigan, took a slightly different approach to sit-ins. Under the leadership of Anna Holden, the Ann Arbor CORE chapter established the Ann Arbor Fair Housing Association (AAFHA) to "secure substantial support from the black community."<sup>316</sup> Beginning in January, the AAFHA began eight months of demonstrations and protests that included continuous picketing, and Sunday marches at Pittsfield Village—a development that refused to rent to an interracial couple. These marches, along with endorsements from local politicians, led to the first black family living in Pittsfield Village in the summer of 1962. The continued use of direct action sit-ins and protests in the spring of 1963 led to three additional black families moving into Pittsfield Village.<sup>317</sup>

While the eastern chapters of CORE had great success using direct action to pursue housing initiatives, their western counterparts were, as Genevieve Hughes concluded, "rather timid about sit-ins. ... The West Coast is two years behind the East Coast in the use of direct action in housing."<sup>318</sup> Los Angeles CORE became the first

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<sup>316</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 185.

<sup>317</sup> Holden to Farmer, November 10, 1962, CORE Archives; "Profile of Ann Arbor Fair Housing Association" [February 1962], CORE Archives; AAFHA press releases, January 28, April 9, 1963, CORE Archives; Lamar Miller to Farmer, March 14, 1963, CORE Archives; Lynn Eley, "The Ann Arbor Fair Housing Ordinance," in Eley, and Thomas Casstevens, eds., *The Politics of Fair Housing Legislation* (San Francisco, 1968), 307-8, 318.

<sup>318</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 186.

chapter on the West Coast to use the sit-in on a housing initiative. Assisting a black physicist not allowed to purchase a \$24,000 home in Monterey Park, members launched a protest, and after five weeks were successful in desegregating the community. This campaign was the first of many over the next twelve months by Los Angeles CORE. Some of these protests led to arrests, forty including people arrested in a demonstration against housing practices in Wilmington, California. Members using passive resistance sat shoulder to shoulder with arms and legs interlocked and “refused to cooperate with law officers, who were forced to “unscramble” them and drag them limp to the paddy wagon.”<sup>319</sup> At the height of the Los Angeles chapter’s use of sit-ins, it launched an initiative against Don Wilson, a prominent suburban developer. The protest lasted for eighteen months and led to 250 arrests of CORE chapter members in Los Angeles.<sup>320</sup>

Northern CORE chapters used these housing initiatives by 1963 to “secure homes and apartments for middle-class blacks in white neighborhoods.”<sup>321</sup> The objective of New York CORE and other northern chapters was, as Farmer noted, “not merely to provide more housing, but to provide integrated housing, an open city and open society.”<sup>322</sup> National CORE felt the country was moving in the direction of racial equality through integrated housing. These men and women believed in the “perfectibility of

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<sup>319</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 186.

<sup>320</sup> Los Angeles CORE Report to 1962 Convention, UC; *Eagle*, February 22, March 1, 8, 15, April 2, July 26, August 2, 16, September 27, October 4, 18, 25, November 8, 15, 1962; January 10, March 14, April 11, May 9, 1963; *Sentinel*, August 2, 16, November 8, 15, 1962; January 17, February 7, 14, May 9, 1963, in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 186.

<sup>321</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 183.

<sup>322</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 184.

human society,” the belief in progress, and the “inevitability of integration.” They assumed that a social acceptance of integration had taken place for,

1. Had not the Negro been freed from slavery and made a citizen?
2. Had not lynching been virtually abolished?
3. Had not segregation been declared unconstitutional?
4. Had not the walls of segregation indeed crumbled?
5. Had not the younger generation of white Americans, together with many of their elders, accepted the idea that integration was inevitable?
6. Had not many white citizens, even those who vigorously oppose every step toward integration, privately admit, It’s here.<sup>323</sup>

What National CORE continually faced was the hostility directed towards integration. The intentional exclusion of the African American community from American society was deliberate and supported in both the North and South. As far back as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, George Washington Cable noted, “the slavery of civil caste can only in part be legislated away.” Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg expanded on this point when they wrote, “during the more than half-century in which [blacks] have been excluded from full participation in American life, the barriers to assimilation [integration] have become more complex.”<sup>324</sup> These four barriers are:

1. The entrenchment of the white man’s sense of group position, not only in the South, but throughout the nation.
2. The continuing spatial segregation of [blacks].
3. The cultural deficit of the [black] masses in a rapidly changing culture.
4. The enduring reality of the black community.

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<sup>323</sup> Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg, Racial Crisis in America: Leadership in Conflict, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 105-106.

<sup>324</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 110.

These barriers confirmed for the African American that,

... Discrimination and segregation did exist, and while the outlines of the pattern may be vague, the core of it is solid. Some statuses which are open to whites are closed to [blacks], and while [blacks] may be admitted to others, they are not allowed full participation. [Blacks] therefore live in a somewhat separate world: he inhabits certain sections of town; he has his own church and social activities; and he is barred from most of the private clubs and organizations and from many public facilities.<sup>325</sup>

Local CORE chapters wanted to change this mindset in society. These chapters understood constitutionally what blacks' rights were, but they also recognized that there was a need to attack the legacy and social justification of racism and its most defined symbol—segregation. The legality of segregation had come to an end, but that did not mean “that progressive, essentially peaceful integration was inevitable.”<sup>326</sup> For this to happen, CORE needed to appeal to “a law higher than man-made law,”<sup>327</sup> for African Americans were confronted with an “ancient problem, the problem of being black in America, a white man's world. ... they lived in a society in which to be unconditionally “American” was to be white, and to be black was a misfortune.”<sup>328</sup> National CORE and its local chapters wanted to redefine the socially constructed idea of being ‘American.’ For that to happen, “the meaning of “American” had to lose its racial modifier, “white.” Integration required a sincere acceptance by all Americans that it was just as good to be a

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<sup>325</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 110-112.

<sup>326</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 107.

<sup>327</sup> Saul D. Alinsky, “Of Means and Ends,” in Fred M. Cox, John L. Erlich, Jack Rothman, and John E. Tropman. Editors, Strategies of Community Organization, (Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1979), 435.

<sup>328</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 109.

black American as to be a white American.”<sup>329</sup> Herein lay the problem National CORE and its chapters faced. In redefining “American,” the organization was redefining “the sense of group position so that the status advantage of the white man was no longer an advantage and [black] Americans could acknowledge their ancestry without apologizing for it.”<sup>330</sup> Northern CORE chapters felt their direct action employment, housing, police protection, and school integration initiatives were fundamental to changing the socially constructed idea of being an “American.” The pursuit of these initiatives allowed CORE chapters to fight for change, but in that pursuit the men and women of CORE had to reevaluate their ideology and action plan.

The first area in which these chapters fought for change was in employment. Local CORE chapters found they had to take a stronger stance with their employment initiatives because of the miniscule advancement of northern blacks in employment. A comparison between white and non-white (for most purposes the black working population) income showed very little gain by blacks in the seven year period from 1954-1961. According to Killian and Grigg in “Tokenism—Too Little, Too Late,”

In 1954, the median annual income of white families was \$4399; of nonwhite families, \$2,410. The nonwhite median income was 56 percent that of the white. ... In 1957, the white income had increased by 10.1 percent to \$5,166, but the Negro had slipped back. Nonwhite income had increased only 14.7 percent to \$2,764 a year, and was now only 53.5 percent of the white income. ... The uncertain and tantalizing course of change continued between 1960-1961, when the median family income of nonwhites actually decreased by 1.3 percent, while that of white families was increasing by 2.5 percent. So, the Negro had lost ground again—his income was now only 53.4 percent that of the white American, a net loss of 2.6 percentage points since 1954 ... There is no clear-cut evidence

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<sup>329</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 108.

<sup>330</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 108.

that the Negro is moving inexorably toward a position of equality in the American economy; there are signs that he may be slipping back slowly.<sup>331</sup>

Local CORE chapters blamed the widening income gap on the discriminatory hiring practices of white northern employers and the lack of educational opportunities for blacks in the North. For this to change, CORE changed its demands, actions, and practices it had in place against companies and eventually schools. CORE took a step back and looked at the larger picture, which showed that the black man was the

Last man on the escalator, and thus more “likely to have little seniority in newly opened areas of employment. Moreover the [black working class] ... still lacked the whole-hearted support of organized labor. But the most significant fact about the employment status of [the black working class] was their continued concentration in the low-skill occupation in an economy which had less and less requirement for unskilled labor.”<sup>332</sup>

These were among the issues that CORE chapters faced during the 1960’s.

By 1963, CORE chapters were still disappointed in the token achievements they were making with their direct action employment campaigns, and they were embarrassed by the limited success they had achieved with these initiatives. Detroit CORE even declared after helping blacks secure jobs and promotions with the Detroit Free Press, “While we realize this is a small number... it is significant because it indicates an active implementation of their fair employment policy... a step in the right direction.”<sup>333</sup> Some CORE chapters conceded that “We have been satisfied too long with token

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<sup>331</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 117-119.

<sup>332</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 119.

<sup>333</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 189.



employment.”<sup>334</sup> The small number of jobs gained through these employment initiatives did not reflect a significant equity change in employment for blacks. New York CORE only gained vague promises from its employment initiatives with the *Daily News*, and the East St. Louis chapter spent months in negotiations with Baptist ministers and major employers but only secured five jobs. Washington CORE, with the threat of boycotting, was promised nondiscriminatory hiring practices by major clothing and drug store chains, and the picketing against and boycotting of a beer establishment by the Los Angeles CORE, over several months, led to the hiring of only two black drivers. The level of frustration escalated with the minimal success of these employment initiatives, and CORE chairman Julius Hobson, for one, indicated that he “refused to accept it.”<sup>335</sup> Their initiatives were reflective of as Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg noted in *Racial Crisis in America*, “... a man trying to put out a bonfire with a teacup. As each ember is extinguished through “tokenism,” the fire blazes more furiously in another place and demands more heroic efforts to smother the glowing core of discontent.”<sup>336</sup>

CORE chapter’s limited progress was a reflection of how their direct action initiatives rarely changed the discriminatory practices of employers in the North. The mindset of the nation was slow to change after years of direct action initiatives, and CORE members expressed frustration with black and white intellectuals, “pink tea methods, sometimes well meaning but getting us nowhere.”<sup>337</sup> “It was one thing to feel,” Hal Brown noted, “that what you have done was successful—it is another to want to go

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<sup>334</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 189.

<sup>335</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 188.

<sup>336</sup> Killian and Grigg, *Racial Crisis*, 105.

<sup>337</sup> Carbado and Weise, *Time on Two Crosses*, 8.

through it again. Blacks did not want to continue this simply in order to get minimal gains.”<sup>338</sup>

Both local CORE chapters and national CORE crusaded for a more determined effort to change employer-hiring practices in the North. Setting in place a plan to increase equal employment in its communities at the 1962 Council meeting, national CORE encouraged the local chapters to fight for “very specific demands,” which far exceeded tokenism, and stressed to employers their “responsibility to locate, select, train—if necessary—and hire nonwhite employees.”<sup>339</sup> The once strong emphasis on merit employment, hiring the most qualified person, regardless of race, became irrelevant on the local and national level. As Gordon Carey, national CORE field director, noted in a letter to Denver CORE,

Now, National CORE is talking in terms of “compensatory” hiring. We are approaching employers with the proposition that they have effectively excluded Negroes from their work force for a long time and that they now have a responsibility and obligation to make up for their past sins.<sup>340</sup>

National CORE dedicated their initiatives and actions to the above platform in December 1962, when it boycotted the Sealtest Dairy Company. Not satisfied with the preferential hiring agreement, CORE fought to increase the number of blacks working at Sealtest through compensatory hiring. CORE, Lincoln Lynch, black chairman of Long Island CORE, noted was, “... trying to drive home to all businesses that the negative policies of

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<sup>338</sup> Interview with Hal Brown, December, 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>339</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 191.

<sup>340</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 192.

yesterday and even the positive policies of yesterday are not going to survive.”<sup>341</sup> After two months of boycotting Sealtest Dairy Company, national CORE and the metropolitan chapters in New York secured employment for ten blacks and were promised “initial exclusive priority to all job openings, except those of contractual obligations during 1963 to Negroes and Spanish-Americans.”<sup>342</sup>

Shortly after the Sealtest Dairy boycott, Long Island CORE turned its attention toward hiring practices by major banking institutions. The branch met with minimal success at first, but by 1963 had secured the preferential hiring of thirty black and Puerto Rican workers within a four-month period. Long Island CORE also negotiated 50 percent of all new job openings held for blacks and Puerto Ricans. Long Island CORE was not alone in expanding its direct action initiatives. By April 1963, Philadelphia CORE revealed the discriminatory hiring practices of trade unions in the construction of municipal buildings. First, Philadelphia chapter took the fight directly to the doorsteps of Mayor James Tate’s home, and then it picketed his reception room at City Hall on two occasions. By May, Mayor Tate briefly stopped construction on the municipal building.<sup>343</sup>

The traditional tactic of negotiating with businesses was becoming a relic of the past. Local CORE chapters were taking a more militant approach in their picketing

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<sup>341</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 192.

<sup>342</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 192.

<sup>343</sup> Eugene Tournour to McCain, March 29, 1962, CORE Archives, and Argus, October 13, 1962, and March 9, 1962; Brooklyn Amsterdam News, January 26, February 16, 23, 1963, and Long Island CORE Report to 1963 Convention, CORE Archives; Philadelphia Bulletin, April 14, 17, 19, May 14, 15, 1963; Tribune, March 30, April 16, 27, 1963; Louis Smith to James Tate, March 24, 1963, CORE Archives in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 192.

techniques. Brooklyn CORE reflected this more radical approach with the Ebinger Bakery initiative. Over the course of several months, members of Brooklyn CORE picketed the Ebinger Bakery in pursuit of jobs for blacks in the community. The initiative came to a boiling point in August 1962, when seven Brooklyn CORE members blocked trucks at the bakery's garage, resulting in their arrest. The use of this tactic in acquiring thirteen jobs was a breakthrough for Brooklyn CORE.<sup>344</sup>

Another tactic used by northern CORE chapters was the "sit-out," in which participants blocked traffic in city streets. New Haven CORE, headed by Blyden Jackson, used this method in two sit-outs during the winter of 1961-62 to address the uprooting of poor blacks by urban renewal. Several hundred blacks sat on curbs, not blocking traffic, in the hopes that their direct action would lead to the passing of a fair-housing ordinance making decent housing available to lower-class blacks. When the bill failed to pass the following spring, New Haven CORE sat-in at City Hall, blocking the entry way and resulting in the arrests of several participants. In the spring of 1963, New York University CORE, in a departure from the direct action sit-in, put to use the tactic of filing complaints with the city to correct housing code violations. Working with the East Side Tenants Council, New York University CORE picketed slumlords whose buildings had

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<sup>344</sup> Fredericka Teer to New York Area Contacts, July 30, 1962, CORE Archives; "Declaration of Intention between Brooklyn CORE and Ebinger Baking Company," August 17, 1962, CORE Archives; Rich to MayLu Murphy, December 17, 1962, CORE Archives; *Brooklyn Amsterdam News*, August 18, 1962; *New York Amsterdam News*, October 27, 1962; "Civil Rights Battle: Northern Style," *Ebony*, XVIII (March 1963), 96-98, 100, 102; and materials in the Ollie Leeds Prs, esp. Brooklyn CORE minutes, May 21, June 4, Aug. 6, 1962; Notes on Meeting of Negotiations Committee and Ebinger Bakery, May 25, 1962; "Ebinger Campaign Memo," August 6, 1962; "Background Information on Brooklyn CORE-Ebinger Negotiations" [1962] in Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 193.

code violation.<sup>345</sup> While success for New York City CORE and New Haven CORE was minimal, both chapters introduced a directional change for CORE in thought and action. CORE devoted more time to employment initiatives in the spring of 1963. Expanding its attention beyond retail stores, CORE highlighted the discriminatory hiring practices of banks, consumer-goods manufacturers and the construction trades. Picketing and boycotts were the direct action tactics customarily used to fight this discrimination, but a more militant stance was taken in the summer of 1962, when CORE went beyond just asking for more jobs for blacks, and instead demanded "... agreements which guaranteed "compensatory" or preferential employment policies."<sup>346</sup>

Another issue of importance to northern CORE chapters was de facto segregation in education. CORE chapters across the North found black children in overcrowded and inferior schools well after the Brown ruling of 1954. While some CORE chapters gave testimony at school board hearings, others picketed the school boards.<sup>347</sup> The latter approach was strongly endorsed by James Farmer.<sup>348</sup> Chicago CORE in 1960 picketed

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<sup>345</sup> New Haven Journal-Courier, September 18, 19, 29, Nov. 10, 1961, February 7, 1962; Gloster Current to Farmer, October 3, 1961, CORE Archives; [Haley], Memoranda on New Haven, September 29, October 7, 1961, CORE, 187.

Archives; New Haven NAACP Voice, September 22, 1961, CORE Archives; Libby Palmer to Carey, October 27, 1961, CORE Archives; Mary Hamilton to McCain, February 23, March 1, 1962, CORE Archives; New Haven CORE Report [March 1962], CORE Archives; Norman Hill to New York Area Contracts, April 30, 1963, CORE Archives in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 187.

<sup>346</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 187.

<sup>347</sup> *Eagle*, June 14, August 30, 1962; Philadelphia CORE Testimony before Philadelphia Board of Education, rec'd December 4, 1962, CORE Archives; Philadelphia *Inquirer*, October 11, 1962 in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 193.

<sup>348</sup> 1961 Convention, Oldham Prs; 1962 Convention, CORE Archives; Farmer Report to 1962 Convention, CORE Archives in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 193.

the school board and advocated that the district transport black students out of overcrowded black schools to the less congested white schools. By the fall of 1962, the Chicago school board opted to erect more Jim Crow mobile classrooms instead of integrating the black students into predominantly white schools. Chicago CORE's response was to picket the construction area where the classrooms were being built. By September of 1962, Oakland and Berkeley CORE followed suit and launched similar school board protests.<sup>349</sup> Local CORE chapters met with resistance from the beginning of their education initiatives. Determined to eliminate de facto segregation in education, CORE chapters began to employ different direct action methods. In Bergen County, New Jersey, CORE in February of 1962 carried out an all night sit-in. Norman Hill, Verma Hill, and Gordon Carey—three national CORE staff—members participated in this sit-in at the Englewood City Hall, and were among the eleven arrested for this protest. By August, Long Island CORE with the help of chairman Lincoln Lynch “dramatized an NAACP de facto school segregation case” with an all-night vigil in the superintendent's office. This was followed a month later with San Francisco CORE staging an overnight sit-in at the Board of Education.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Chicago CORE, Reports, February 1961, and n.d. [fall 1962], CORE Archives; *Defender*, September 3 and 24, 1960, September 208, 16-22, 1961; Faith Rich to Board of Education and Len O'Connor, August 22, 1961, Faith Rich Prs; Fred Fields to Farmer, December 30, 1961, CORE Archives; *Integrated Education*, I (January 1963), 22-23; Samuel Riley to Dear Alderman, January 17, 1963, Faith Rich Papers; Chicago South Unit Report, rec'd November 20, 1962, CORE Archives, Oakland *Tribune*, May 2, September 19, 1962; *Integrated Education*, II (April-May 1964), 43; Berkley CORE press releases, May 1 and September 19, 1962, CORE Archives; Berkley CORE, presentation to Berkley Board of Education, May 1, 1962, WEST COAST OFFICE Archives; Berkley *Correspondent*, October 1962, CORE Archives in Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 193.

<sup>350</sup> For Englewood, see Times, February 7, 17, 1962, and *CORE-lator*, April 1962. For Malverne, see *Times*, August 1, 3, 1962, and *Brooklyn Amsterdam News*, July 27, 1962.

In addition to sit-ins, local chapters used boycotts to end de facto segregation in education. Brooklyn CORE with the help of Reverend Milton Galamison's Parents Workshop for Equality in New York City Schools, launched a boycott in September 1962. The two organizations urged a small group of black parents to remove their children from the segregated black schools and hold a twenty-six hour Board of Education sit-in. Feeling pressure from the direct action of Brooklyn CORE and Reverend Galamison's organization, officials from the Board of Education placed the black children in largely white-populated schools. Bergen County, New Jersey, and Syracuse, New York, CORE quickly followed Brooklyn CORE's education initiative. In September of 1962, each chapter boycotted against all black elementary schools. Syracuse CORE's one-day boycott led to a promise by the board to investigate the problem, and after a close study—the board closed the two Jim Crow black schools. Individuals in the North also fought against de facto segregation in education. Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Bibuld, an interracial couple who were members of Brooklyn CORE, in 1962 removed their children from P.S. 282, a predominantly black school. Elaine and Jerome, who played an active role in their children's education, found the educational standards low at P.S. 282. When the Bibulds discovered their ten-year-old son Douglas, a fifth grader, was doing third grade work, they took their children out of the school and the Board of Education sued them for violating the state attendance law. The Bibulds and other Brooklyn CORE members responded by holding a 120-hour sit-in. This sit-in, according to the New York Amsterdam News, "changed the heart of the Board of

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For San Francisco, see San Francisco CORE, Statement to Board of Education, September 1, 1962, WCO; Fredricka Teer, Report, September 24, 1962; San Francisco *Chronicle*, September 19, 20, 1962 in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 193.

Education,” and it granted a transfer of the Bibuld’s children to the integrated PS 130 School.<sup>351</sup> Englewood CORE soon followed this boycott with a three-day boycott against the all-black Lincoln school, which resulted in no action by the Board of Education. Not deterred, Englewood held another boycott in February of 1963 to end the segregating policies at Lincoln.<sup>352</sup>

These local CORE chapters wanted black children to have a quality education. They battled against this form of de facto segregation because it,

Constituted a vicious circle in which educational inferiority perpetuated itself. Undereducated parents sent culturally deprived children to school to be taught by inadequately prepared teachers and to go in turn, to inferior Negro colleges to become the parents and teachers of another generation of Negro children.<sup>353</sup>

The evidence of the above sentiment was overwhelming in the 1960’s. In 1953-1954, Eli Ginsberg conducted a case study of 81 segregated high schools in large southern cities.

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<sup>351</sup> New York Amsterdam News, “Bibulds Find School O.K.,” February 16, 1963

<sup>352</sup> For Brooklyn, see New York Amsterdam News, September 8, 22, 1962; Times September 19, 1962; Brooklyn Amsterdam News, October 27, November 17, December 9, 1962, and February 2, 9, 16, 1963; Brooklyn CORE *North Star*, November 1, 1962 and February [sic] 1963, Leeds Prs; “The Bibuld Case Fact Sheet,” December 3, 1962, Leeds Prs; Brooklyn CORE press releases [October 1962], Leeds Prs, and January 7, 1963, CORE Archives; Irving Goldaber “Treatment by the New York City School Board of Problems Affecting the Negro, 1954-1963,” For Syracuse, see Ronald D. Corwin, “School Desegregation in Syracuse,” Syracuse Post-Standard, June 19, August 30, September 26, 1962; George Wiley Papers: Wiley, “History of De Facto Segregation Negotiations and Action in Syracuse,” Oct. 1969; Statements by Syracuse CORE, September 14, October 21, 1962. For Englewood, see Sally Elliot to Don Wendell, May 22, 1962, CORE Archives, “Englewood Movement” [ Summer 1962], CORE Archives; David Spengler, “The Englewood-Teaneck, New Jersey Experience,” in T. Bentley Edwards and Frederick Wirt, eds., *School Desegregation in the North* (San Francisco, 1967), 202-41 in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 193-194.

<sup>353</sup> Lewis and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 122.



He concluded that “only three out of every one hundred graduates from segregated Negro high schools in the South were qualified for a good interracial college.”<sup>354</sup> CORE recognized that black children in many segregated Negro schools both in the North and South received an education that was inferior to its white counterpart. Black children at an alarming rate were failing academically, and proof of this came in the form of universal standardized tests.

One such test was the “Florida Twelfth Grade Test.” This standardized test, which was administered to all high school seniors, was designed to show a student’s knowledge in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and humanities. By 1954, “93.6 percent of Negro seniors who took the test scored lower than 50 percent of the white seniors,” and 90 percent of black students, compared to 40 percent of white students, fell below the mean score of 200.<sup>355</sup> The Twelfth Grade Test became a part of the admission requirements in southern universities in 1957 to promote, as Admiral Hyman Rickover noted, a “quality education.” The mean score of 200 was made the automatic cut-off point for all high school seniors taking the exam and applying to southern universities.

Five years after these mandates were put into place, the damage of de facto school segregation was clear. As Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg noted in Racial Crisis in America:

Of 6,673 Negro high school seniors who took the Twelfth Grade Test in the spring of 1962, only 139, or 2 percent, made scores of 300 or better on the test! Only 475, slightly over 7 percent, made scored 200 or higher. In the same year, 41 percent of white high school seniors scored 300 or better, and 64 percent scored 200 or better. But 93 percent of the Negro

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<sup>354</sup> Lewis and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 121.

<sup>355</sup> Lewis and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 121.

seniors scored less than 200 and even higher proportion than the 90 percent in 1954!<sup>356</sup>

These data were a rude awakening to the quality of education for black children not only in the South, but also for northern CORE chapters in their own communities.

As the Civil Rights movement gained momentum in the 1960's, CORE had an identity crisis. Its chapters in the North and South were gaining ground with their campaigns, but the organization was geographically and ideologically divided between North and South and local versus National CORE. Northern chapters entered into the urban sectors and brought attention to the plight of the black poor, but in the process realized their organization's identity did not reflect the black poor whom they were supposed to be helping. National and northern CORE chapters were made up largely of educated middle class black and white people thought to be, as Cleveland CORE member Tony Perot stated, "an elitist group."<sup>357</sup> Northern CORE chapters worked to improve housing, employment, and school opportunities for poor working class blacks, but there was a social and economic distance between the organization and the community it was trying to help. "There was, as August Meier and Elliot Rudwick noted, in fact, considerable anxiety over what was regarded as CORE's inadequacy in relating to the black community, both because of the organizations disproportionately white membership and the predominantly middle-class status of people, whether white or black, who were attracted to CORE."<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Lewis and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 122.

<sup>357</sup> Interview with Ruth and Antoine Perot, Jr., April 17, 1972 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>358</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 195.

There was a growing feeling amongst the local northern CORE chapters that there were not enough black members in CORE. Juanita Nelson, a Cleveland CORE member, recalled as early as 1943 the chapter was “mostly white,” and that CORE had “more whites than Negroes.”<sup>359</sup> Compared to the southern chapters, which rarely sought out white members, northern chapters were characteristically white and “not solid in the black community.”<sup>360</sup> While National CORE recognized this growing concern, it stayed committed to maintaining an interracial organization. Gordon Carey, national field director, assured CORE members that they:

Should not be disturbed about the apathy of the Negro community in participation in CORE. This is a problem that every group faces throughout the North. It is unfortunate; it is difficult to deal with... but it is always possible to develop an interracial group in spite of this.<sup>361</sup>

National CORE was committed to the destruction of racism through the actions of an interracial non-violent direct action organization. The sentiment on the local level did not reflect the same devotion to this national motto. By the early 1960's, for example, Columbus CORE was so heavily white that a black Ohio State University student was “bitter” that a picket of the Rollerland Skating Rink consisted “largely, if not completely, of Caucasians.”<sup>362</sup> The CORE of 1942 envisioned a national federation of local interracial groups working to abolish racial discrimination by direct non-violent methods. By the

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<sup>359</sup> Interview with Juanita Nelson, August 1967 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>360</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 195.

<sup>361</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 195.

<sup>362</sup> *Ohio State Lantern*, April 24, 1961, cited in James Vander Zanden, *American Minority Relations* (New York, 1963), 314-15.

mid-1960's, the reality was that these groups were predominantly white. In the North East, where 27 chapters existed by 1965, Walter Brooks, field secretary, noted it was his "impression that the majority of people at chapter meetings were white and that these groups on average were 60% white."<sup>363</sup>

The trend of white dominated chapters also existed in San Diego CORE. Hal Brown, who joined San Diego CORE in 1961, said whites constituted 90% of the chapter when it was founded and by 1964 made up 80% of the chapter. There was as Hal Brown noted, a "great white sophisticated image... that controlled meetings thru their knowledge of parliamentary procedures"<sup>364</sup> This overwhelming presence of a more educated, experienced, and sophisticated white contingent kept blacks from becoming chapter leaders. "Black members," according to Hal Brown, "were taking a secondary role in the CORE chapter, and were reluctant to voice their opinions," a reality that discouraged blacks in the community from joining the organization.<sup>365</sup> CORE chapters wanted to define themselves as an "independent community based membership organizations composed of people acting on their own behalf."<sup>366</sup> The goal was to establish a "neighborhood community organization and political action."<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Interview with Walter Brooks, August 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with Hal Brown, December 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>365</sup> Interview with Hal Brown, December 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>366</sup> Janice E. Pearlman, in Fred M. Cox, John L. Erlich, Jack Rothman, and John E. Tropman, editors, "Grassrooting the System: Lessons of the Sixties," in *Strategies of Community Organization*, (Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1979) 406.

<sup>367</sup> Fred M. Cox, John L. Erlich, Jack Rothman, and John E. Tropman, *Strategies of Community Organization*, (Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1979) 16.

The interracial philosophy that animated the organization in 1942 was lacking within the CORE chapters in the 1960's. There was a chasm between the chapters and the black community. "We have not had," Chicago Southside CORE's black chairmen stated," the support we hoped from the community.... We are continually looking for some new approach to this problem but at this point we really have not met with too much success."<sup>368</sup> Even the very successful Boston CORE by late 1963 and early 1964 was dominated by white membership. Richard Brown, a Boston CORE member, lamented that:

At meetings whites did more talking than blacks. Actually there were more whites who attended meetings. It was a source of embarrassment, in fact, that more than 80% of the people at the meetings were white, and ... the prominence of the whites in the chapter was one reason why the chapter did not have the black community behind it.<sup>369</sup>

CORE chapters were further distanced from the black community because of their bourgeois image. Education was a contributing factor to this bourgeois image. By the 1962 convention membership was defined as "primarily middle to upper middle-class."<sup>370</sup> Black members were, as Inge Powell Bell noted in *CORE and the Strategy of Nonviolence*, "highly mobile; children of semi-skilled or unskilled working class fathers," who "had risen to professional or clerical jobs." White members, on the other hand,

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<sup>368</sup> John Schopp to Rich, January 6, 1962, CA; Chicago Southside Unit Report, rec'd November 20, 1962, CORE Archives, Wisconsin in Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 193-194.

<sup>369</sup> Interview with Richard Brown, December 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>370</sup> 1962 CORE Convention, CORE Archives.

constituted the upper middle-class defined as the “liberal intelligentsia.”<sup>371</sup> This socio-economic description put CORE and its chapters “out of touch” with the “rank and file Negro.”<sup>372</sup> As Walter Brooks of New Haven CORE noted, “street people did not like the presence of smart white people.”<sup>373</sup> The CORE of the old days, as Fredericka Kushner observed,

Used to be a spiritual emphasis—love your neighbor—the Gandhi an philosophy, and pacifism—but this kind of philosophy did not go over in a Negro community and we had few Negro members therefore. Whites in the past could afford to sit around and think about their spiritual well being. But Negroes could not afford to feel around with that kind of thing for Negroes we had to have a more practical type of appeal... we had to go into the Negro community.<sup>374</sup>

The same attitude prevailed in the Long Island CORE chapter, where one woman noted,

It was fine to begin as interracial, and this worked in white communities. But once you work in black communities, you must present black faces. Blacks needed the feeling that it was an organization for their problems and if white faces were in the organization, they did not get this feeling. It is impossible to organize them if you are not of them.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Inge Powell Bell, CORE and the Strategy of Non-Violence (New York: Random House, 1968), 74, 67-69.

<sup>372</sup> Genevieve Hughes, Report, April 11-15, 1962, CORE Archives; Minutes of Metropolitan Area Coordinating Council, Jan. 11, 1962, CORE Archives.

<sup>373</sup> Interview with Walter Brooks, August 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>374</sup> Interview with Fredericka Kushner, December 1965 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>375</sup> Interview with a female member of Long Island CORE in August Meier Papers.

Northern CORE chapters felt that “when we presented our face to the public, it should always be a black face.”<sup>376</sup> The black community as early as 1942, according to Bayard Rustin, believed that “these are Negroes’ problems and Negroes will have to work them out.”<sup>377</sup> The above sentiment by the 1960’s argued that whites needed to take a background role in CORE. “If whites were used,” according to David Dennis a member of National CORE,” instead of blacks by CORE then the local people would still feel dependent on whites and not get the idea that they could manage their own struggle.”<sup>378</sup> Having black leaders in CORE signified that they were capable and not impotent or inferior leaders in the movement. There was a growing belief that “blacks should control the things that have to do with their lives... and control their destiny.”<sup>379</sup> CORE came to represent for many black members a way to “abolish racial discrimination, not integrate in the sense of living next door to whites... and nurture black pride.”<sup>380</sup> It was increasingly important to have, as Anna Holden, an active member of D.C. CORE, noted, “blacks in key leadership positions for credibility and strength in the black community. A minority movement that does not have its main base in the minority community is ridiculous for its main source of strength should be primarily black.”<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Interview with Sam Kushner, December 1965 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>377</sup> Carbado and Weise, Time on Two Crosses, 8.

<sup>378</sup> Interview with David J. Dennis, June 30, 1972 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>379</sup> Interview with David J. Dennis, June 30, 1972 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>380</sup> Interview with Hal Brown, December 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>381</sup> Telephone Interview with Anna Holden, September 1971 in August Meier Papers.

The elitist perception of CORE, especially among “grass-root blacks,” hindered the organization’s growth, but it was not the only contributing factor. The tactic of direct action was a deterrent to some blacks because they found it offensive. Working-class and poor blacks were not willing to chance arrest during a protest or demonstration. Other factors thought to deter blacks from joining CORE ranged from concerns about interracial dating, a lack of a strong physical presence in the black church and community, and the actions of radical whites. For many blacks the interracial status of CORE became a tactic, not a lifestyle. These black men and women wanted an equal society in which to raise their families. They did not desire to mix culturally with their counterparts, evidenced by their concern over interracial dating. The rift between CORE chapters and local black churches contributed to the lack of black membership. CORE desired to present itself as an organization that created its power base from grassroots membership, yet its relationship with the black church, a core element in the black grass roots community and movement, was lackluster. Chapters meeting outside these black communities only distanced the organization further from the community. There was a growing feeling that black leadership in chapters was crucial in order to establish a base in the black community. This black leadership according to Norman Hill would “secure more black support for CORE,”<sup>382</sup> an arduous task because of the strong hold more established civil rights organizations had over the black community. CORE had to contend with organizations like the NAACP and black politicians who according August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, “enjoyed close ties with religious and fraternal

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<sup>382</sup> Interview with Norman Hill, December 15, 1970 in August Meier Papers.



organizations.”<sup>383</sup> According to Inge Powell Bell, “CORE leaders at the national and local levels began considerable soul searching into their failure to compete successfully for the allegiance of the Northern Negro masses.”<sup>384</sup> An informal conversation between National Director James Farmer and a leader of a Bay Area CORE chapter reflected this sentiment:

Farmer: We have to think how do we reach the masses.

J: CORE has failed because we are afraid to get down on the street with those masses of people who are really seeking something. The people most vulnerable are the people seeking for identification, and we don’t reach them.<sup>385</sup>

CORE was determined to reach the black masses, and the first step toward making inroads was appointing black men and women to key leadership positions in CORE chapters. Whether on the East or West Coast, CORE chapters found themselves placing black men and women in leadership roles. A prime example was George Wiley in Syracuse; Gladys Harrington in New York; Louis Smith in Philadelphia; Shirley Lacey in Englewood, New Jersey; Julius Hobson in Washington; Walter Carter in Baltimore; Oliver Leeds in Brooklyn; Robert Curvin in Newark; Arthur Evans in Cleveland; Lincoln Lynch of Long Island; Earl Walter in Los Angeles; Wilfred Ussery in San Francisco; and Harold Brown of San Diego CORE.

With this new black leadership CORE chapters went into the ghettos to recruit new members. They used a variety of tactics to increase their presence in the black

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<sup>383</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 197.

<sup>384</sup> Bell, CORE, 48.

<sup>385</sup> Bell, CORE, 48-49.

community. From speaking engagements in the community to moving their meetings to the “heart of the Negro community,” CORE chapters were “desperately trying to get more Negroes involved.”<sup>386</sup> CORE chapters realized that “much of the program had been aimed toward the bourgeois, the educated,” and they “we’re not going to get off the ground that way.”<sup>387</sup> Between 1962 and 1965, CORE chapters established stronger “ties with the Negro community.” Philadelphia, San Francisco, New Haven, and Ann Arbor CORE were the first to acquire facilities for meetings in the ghetto. Cleveland, St. Louis, and Syracuse CORE followed in 1963 by establishing meeting places in the black community.<sup>388</sup>

The trend was firmly in place by the spring of 1963, and this physical action proved beneficial for these CORE chapters in the coming months. With the recruitment of black members by Oakland and Cleveland CORE, there was a shift in the make-up of certain northern and western CORE chapters. Chapters once overwhelmingly white, like Philadelphia and St. Louis CORE, under black leadership revolutionized their membership to reflect the grassroots black community. CORE emphasized its commitment to bridging the gap between the organization and the black masses at the 1964 CORE convention in Durham, North Carolina. With the theme “The Black Ghetto: An Awakening Giant,” CORE leaders and members devised a new action plan that called for, “community centers, work training, and political organization of welfare

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<sup>386</sup> Blyden Jackson to Farmer, March 20, 1962, CORE Archives.

<sup>387</sup> New York CORE, “Yesterday—Today, Progress Report, October 1963,” CORE Archives; *New York Amsterdam News*, April 21, 1962.

<sup>388</sup> Libby Palmer, Report on New Haven CORE, March 12, 1962; Ann Arbor CORE, Report [late 1962], CORE Archives.

recipients, all projects that would, build up a real lower class membership and attack directly the economic, social, and political problems of the masses of Negro poor.”<sup>389</sup>

These new community organizations moved CORE chapters in a direction that established a congenial relationship between themselves and the black masses.

Increasingly, CORE’s make-up reflected more African American members than white members. Baltimore CORE reflected this trend at the 1966 convention with three-fourths of its delegates being African American. Northern CORE chapters penetrated into the black ghettos to recruit from the masses who had been underrepresented in the movement.

While Philadelphia, Oakland, Brooklyn, New Haven, St. Louis, and Cleveland CORE chapters met with success, not all chapters were successful in creating this shift in membership. Several CORE chapters were unable to recruit “grass-roots blacks” into their group. “In our few recruiting attempts,” according to a Syracuse CORE leader, “which involved canvassing the ’ward’ and speaking in several churches, we have been notoriously unsuccessful. Perhaps our orientation is wrong.... We are attempting to revolutionize a staunchly Republican city...where the Negro leadership itself has not demonstrated much dynamism.”<sup>390</sup>

Unlike Syracuse, Brooklyn CORE was successful in recruiting poor working-class blacks and addressing problems that affected their community. By the summer and fall of 1962, Brooklyn CORE developed initiatives that not only addressed school and

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<sup>389</sup> Bell, CORE, 179.

<sup>390</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 199.

employment integration, but also brought attention to health and sanitary conditions.<sup>391</sup>

The picketing actions of Brooklyn CORE against Beth-El hospital and its dumping of garbage on Brooklyn Borough Hall were “an attempt to develop a grassroots approach toward the elimination of the everyday reality of discrimination in the ghetto, an effort to involve people ... in direct nonviolent action on their concrete problems.”<sup>392</sup> According to Meier and Rudwick, the goal of these initiatives was to “encourage an approach which [led] to more roots in the Negro community, which in turn would make, civil rights a reality for the great bulk of working-class Negroes.”<sup>393</sup>

By the mid-1960's, the Congress of Racial Equality was at a crossroads. Many of the local northern chapters recognized that community organization, instead of direct action, in the black ghettos was fundamental to the future of CORE. These chapters set new priorities in order to bridge the rift between the organization and the black working class. They increasingly fostered community centers and skills training programs in the black community that appealed to ghetto residents.

A significant shift took place in CORE that had a direct affect on the core ideals of the organization. There existed geographical divides between northern and southern chapters, but more importantly was the ideological divide between national CORE and its local chapters. This divide caused a fracturing in the organization that turned men and women, once friends, into bitter enemies.

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<sup>391</sup> Brooklyn CORE along with the assistance of Norman Hill, National CORE assistant director, took action against inadequate garbage collection and the actions of slumlords in these black communities.

<sup>392</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 200.

<sup>393</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 200.

## THE OPENING OF PANDORA’S BOX: CORE AT A CROSSROADS

### CORE’S RULES OF ACTION

In 1942, CORE devised its Rules of Action for its chapters to follow. The founding members based these acts upon CORE’s goal of erasing the color line. The rules noted, according to historian Inge Powell Bell, “All groups affiliated with national CORE [would] agree to follow the nonviolent procedure in all action which they sponsor.”<sup>394</sup> The notion of nonviolence was important to CORE because it symbolized, as Bell noted, “(1) the power of active good will and no retaliation; (2) the power of public opinion against an injustice; (3) the power of refusing to be a party to injustice, as illustrated by the boycott and the strike.”<sup>395</sup> For the founding members, this nonviolent tactic was the best approach to the challenge of eliminating racial discrimination and injustice. They envisioned this tactic, Bell declared as, “a lasting resolution to [racial discrimination] through a spirit of good will and understanding.”<sup>396</sup> The end goal of this action plan was to create an integrated environment, where people’s character had more value than their skin color.

For twenty years, men and women in CORE followed these Rules of Action with great devotion. They lived the lifestyle of nonviolence and concentrated on integrating society. The organization was a unified entity that did not stray away from its goal of making color a non-issue. The Journey of Reconciliation, the Freedom Ride, and the

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<sup>394</sup> Inge Powell Bell, CORE and the Strategy of Nonviolence (New York: Random House, 1968), 195.

<sup>395</sup> Bell, CORE, 195.

<sup>396</sup> Bell, CORE, 195.

plethora of direct action protests are all examples of this solid ideological and strategic image of CORE. Yet a change took place in CORE in 1962. CORE was in the midst of, as James Hicks, a writer for the New York Amsterdam News, noted, a “Wind of Change.” Hicks lamented that “Militant Negroes are knocking on the doors of the status quo pleading in various ways for a change in the scheme of things ... [and] they are asking for a better deal for the Negro.”<sup>397</sup> The new dynamic within CORE refused to be slave to the system of white supremacy in the United States. This new cohort associated a new importance to being a black person in this country. This cohort led CORE in a new direction. These men and women, according to Paul Zuber, a civil rights attorney, “got mad and discovered that [they] had been the chumps for ninety years. They suddenly realized that [they would] remain second class citizens until they did something about it.”<sup>398</sup>

It was in the above climate that fundamental changes took place in CORE. The northern chapters by 1962, with a rapid increase in new membership, ideology and strategy, focused less on the concept of integration and nonviolence, but, instead, stressed black separatism and the tribulations of poor blacks. The existence of the northern urban CORE was far different from its southern Christian counterpart. The Christian doctrine of southern Baptist preachers did not compel these men and women. They did not adhere to the traditional CORE discipline of nonviolence or the Rules of Action put in place in 1942. “This ideology,” according to Inge Powell Bell, author of CORE and the Strategy of Nonviolence, “made little sense to the ghetto inhabitants whose way of life was riddled

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<sup>397</sup> New York Amsterdam News, February 10, 1962.

<sup>398</sup> New York Amsterdam News, July 21, 1962.

with violence and who saw nonviolence merely another version of the humility and passivity demanded of the Negro throughout his long subordination in America.”<sup>399</sup> In response to the question, “Are you a believer in nonviolence?”, a black female CORE student volunteer from Hunter College responded:

Well, someone said yesterday, ‘I believe in nonviolence intellectually and theoretically, but if I got hit upside my head, I don’t know what I do.’ Now, that applies to me, too. In theory, I have to agree with it and it can be used as a weapon. It’s a toss-up on how it’s used. Basically I guess I am nonviolent, but I think if it came to a matter of self-defense, and the numbers were right, I think I wouldn’t be terribly nonviolent.<sup>400</sup>

Within a year of the 1961 Freedom Rides, these members wanted to make standard practice the foot-stomping action used during the February 1962 Englewood school board sit-in or the all-night school sit-ins used in both San Francisco and Englewood. Los Angeles CORE followed suit, when its members locked arms and legs and forced the authorities to carry them to the squad cars. While not violent in nature, this new “tactical radicalization” trend, as August Meier and Elliott Rudwick noted, became for northern chapters a more militant approach to achieve change. James Farmer and national CORE complained that this change “violated CORE discipline and the principle of nonviolent direct action. ... Under no conditions would we approve of such a tactic. We would approve of a sit-in—quiet, peaceful, and orderly, but not a noisy disruption of the proceedings.”<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Bell, CORE, 16.

<sup>400</sup> Interview with unidentified black female CORE volunteer in August Meier Papers at Schomburg Center, New York Public Library.

<sup>401</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement 1942-68 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 200-201

The ideological and strategic image of CORE changed to reflect a more militant organization that, according to CORE member Marvin Rich, was “committed to eliminating discrimination, not to reconciling the discriminator.”<sup>402</sup> While Farmer and older CORE members remained steadfast to the original principles of CORE, the era and its people had changed. As early as the spring of 1962, the new CORE that emerged had the goal of change now, not later. They no longer believed that nonviolent action would result in successful initiatives and campaigns. Rather, more frequent was the understanding, according to Wilfred Ussery, leader of San Francisco CORE, that “we don’t talk about nonviolence anymore.”<sup>403</sup> Ussery further declared, “The crucial point for the Negro is that on the one hand, with respect to violence, he is not starting anything. On the other hand, he may be ready to start something if he doesn’t get his demands immediately. ... I am trying to convey an appropriate sense of urgency... this country is on the brink of blowing up over the issue of second-class citizenship.”<sup>404</sup>

There was a growing sentiment within CORE chapters that nonviolence was a futile strategy. Farmer and national CORE, though, remained committed to nonviolence as the proper approach to gaining CORE’s goals in the movement. Farmer noted, “We are troubled by hate,” and “the angry young men of the present generation” who doubt “the nonviolent direct action ideals.” He stressed however that anyone or any chapter using other methods would “no longer be a part of CORE.”<sup>405</sup> Even with Farmer’s statement,

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<sup>402</sup> Marvin Rich to Carl Rachlin, November 3, 1961, CORE Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

<sup>403</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 203.

<sup>404</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 203.

<sup>405</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 203.



there was a strong understanding, according to Robert Curvin, chairman of Newark CORE, “that as CORE and other Civil Rights organizations achieved successes it was clear that direct action had not, and was not able to, solve the basic problems facing the masses of blacks.”<sup>406</sup>

The growing skepticism of CORE being an interracial group intensified with the increase in urban poor working class black members in CORE chapters. There existed an attitude, according to Gladys Harrington, New York CORE chairman, that the Civil Rights Movement and its organizations “should basically be run by Negroes.”<sup>407</sup> Members within Brooklyn CORE echoed Harrington’s attitude when they noted, “Many Negroes simply will not allow their civil rights struggle to be led by whites.”<sup>408</sup>

This changing attitude towards whites as leaders in CORE caused a major divide in local chapters. Detroit CORE, overwhelmingly white, for instance, fractured into three factions in 1961. One faction argued that CORE should be an all-black organization, while the second faction insisted on the interracial dynamic of CORE, but with black leadership.<sup>409</sup> The third faction criticized both factions as racist obstacles to CORE’s ideology of a colorblind society and formally left Detroit CORE to form Metropolitan Detroit CORE. Detroit CORE members Ralph and Janice Rosenfeld recalled, “The issues that split the chapter were black leadership, and commitment to nonviolence.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Interview with Robert Curvin, April 2-3, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>407</sup> Interview with Gladys Harrington in August Meier Papers.

<sup>408</sup> Brooklyn CORE *North Star*, November 1, 1962, CORE Archives.

<sup>409</sup> Supporters of this faction believed that whites could pledge to represent the point of view of the black community.

<sup>410</sup> Interview with Ralph and Janice Rosenfeld, July 9-10, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

An organization that once thrived on unity within a brotherhood now harbored feelings of ambivalence and strong hostility toward whites in CORE. One CORE Detroit member declared, “We’ve let whites set our values,” and this according to Fredricka Teer, a Baltimore CORE member, led to “strong anti-white feelings.”<sup>411</sup> Whites represented, according to Lula Farmer, “a new deal idealism” that worked in the initial years when blacks tended to be nonpolitical.<sup>412</sup> For twenty years, CORE had existed as a small-scale direct action organization. It emphasized strict nonviolence, integration in public accommodations, and was overwhelmingly white.<sup>413</sup> Between 1961 and 1964, however, CORE developed into a mass direct action organization. While maintaining a nonviolent platform, the organization “shifted from nonviolent goodwill,” according to Bell, “to the organization of coercive pressure through massive direct action demonstrations.”<sup>414</sup> By the end of this stage, the notion of blacks being nonpolitical was changing. In late 1964, the era of ghetto organization developed as CORE's third stage of existence. It was during this stage that the political voice of the black poor emerged. Black power, both politically and economically, became the central goal in campaigns and initiatives for CORE. Political and community organization replaced direct action, while the tactic of self-defense replaced nonviolence.<sup>415</sup>

The transition to this third stage changed the role of whites in CORE. Their position began to weaken in CORE as racial pride gained greater strength. It was

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<sup>411</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 205.

<sup>412</sup> Interview with Lula Farmer, February 27, 1963 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>413</sup> Bell, CORE, 17.

<sup>414</sup> Bell, CORE, 17.

<sup>415</sup> Bell, CORE, 17.

becoming increasingly difficult for blacks within CORE to accept white leadership and even membership in the organization. Lerone Bennett, Jr., author of The Negro Mood, argued that “for various reasons, most of them eminently realistic, oppressed people have insisted, with disturbing unanimity, that it is impossible to be both a member of the oppressor class and friend to the oppressed.”<sup>416</sup> Blacks in CORE now defined their white counterparts as white liberals whose actions produced insignificant results. Increasingly, blacks within CORE, according to Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg perceived, the biracial “team” approach as a superficial type of communication. The changes this approach produced were “insignificant in comparison with the results of independent, aggressive action by militant Negro leaders who approached the white power structure with threats, not petitions.”<sup>417</sup>

Black Nationalist groups influenced this aggressive militant action. Such groups as the Black Muslims, with the charismatic rhetoric of Malcolm X, resonated with black CORE members. The ideas of Black Nationalism, pride and independence propelled these men and women to move in a separatist direction. Some CORE members found solace in the Nation’s ideology. Ruth Turner of Cleveland CORE, a strong advocate for Black Nationalism, called it “The Black Ghetto—the Awakening Giant.”<sup>418</sup> Black

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<sup>416</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., The Negro Mood and Other Essays (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1964) 75.

<sup>417</sup> Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg, Racial Crisis in America: Leadership in Conflict (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964) 105.

<sup>418</sup> Interview with Robert Curvin, January, 1969 in August Meier Papers.

Nationalism and Black Power, Curvin suggested, was “a label that was influencing people emotionally, in a sort of mass psychology, stampeding them.”<sup>419</sup>

In an editorial piece for the New York Amsterdam News entitled “What Do The Muslims Want,” Elijah Muhammad revealed the ideology that resonated with CORE members. Muhammad stated:

We want freedom; We want full and complete freedom.  
We want justice. Equal justice under the law. We want justice applied  
equally to all, regardless of creed or class or color.

We want equality of opportunity. We want equal membership in society  
with the best in civilized society.

We want an immediate end to police brutality and mob attacks against the  
so-called Negro throughout the United States.

We do not believe that after 400 years of free or nearly free labor, sweat  
and blood, which has helped America become rich and powerful, that so  
many thousands of black people should have to subsist on relief, charity or  
live in poor houses.

We believe that the Federal government should intercede to see that black  
men and women tried in white courts receive justice in accordance with  
the laws of the land—or allow us to build a new nation for ourselves,  
dedicated to justice, freedom, and liberty.

Since we cannot get along with them in peace and equality, after giving  
them 400 years of our sweat and blood and receiving in return some of the  
worst treatment human beings have ever experience, we believe our  
contributions to this land and the suffering forced upon us by white  
America, justifies our demand for complete separation in a state or  
territory of our own.

As long as we are not allowed to establish a state or territory of our own,  
we demand not only equal justice under the laws of the United States, but  
equal employment opportunities... NOW!<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with Robert Curvin, July 31, 1966 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>420</sup> New York Amsterdam News, August 4, 1962.

While the Nation of Islam and CORE shared certain goals, their approaches were drastically different. Muhammad and the Nation spoke of the empowerment of the black man and woman, which became the ultimate goal of complete freedom and independence. Gary T. Marx, author of Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community, claimed, “A vital element of all Negro protest is the quest for dignity ... among the Black Muslims, unlike other groups, dignity is best pursued within the framework of an all-black society.”<sup>421</sup> This mindset appealed to blacks within CORE. “Just because the Black Muslims,” one unidentified CORE convention delegate declared, “don’t eat pork, that ain’t going to stop us from getting together with them.”<sup>422</sup>

Important black leaders within CORE began to see the influential effect of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the Nation of Islam. Robert Gore, CORE’s assistant community relations director, witnessed this ideological shift firsthand at a debate between Bayard Rustin and Malcolm X in 1962:

I came away... with mixed feelings... Being a pacifist, a Negro, and one who has been involved in the racial struggle lately I expected to be with Bayard all the way and against Mr. X completely. My mixed feelings were a result of the discovery that I was applauding more for Malcolm X than I was Bayard Rustin.... There is no question in my mind but that Bayard presented the saner attitude, but the amazing thing was how eloquently Malcolm X stated the problems which Negroes have confronted for so many years. ... I must confess that it did my heart a world of good to sit back and listen to Mr. X list the sins of the white man toward the black man in America.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Gary T. Marx, Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 28.

<sup>422</sup> Interview with Robert Curvin, July 31, 1966 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>423</sup> Robert Gore, “Black on Black,” 1962, CORE Archives.

Farmer was quick to state CORE's official stance on the Nation of Islam. "The Muslims," he declared, "are all black and CORE is interracial. The Muslims are separatists and CORE is integrationist. The Muslims do not reject violence as a solution; CORE does."<sup>424</sup> Farmer furthered this position at a speaking engagement in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "Theirs is a movement," he stressed, "of despair. They represent the view that America will not and cannot implement its democratic ideals. CORE is a movement of hope that America can live up to its credo."<sup>425</sup>

Coming increasingly under scrutiny was the ideology of CORE as this interracial group strived for a just and integrated society. Even with CORE's official stance on the Nation of Islam, there was a level of respect for the organization and its leaders. A growing divide caused tension in CORE. Farmer, fully aware of this tension, emphasized at the 1962 national convention, "We no longer are a tight fellowship of a few dedicated advocates of a brilliant new method of social change; we are now a large family spawned by the union of the method-oriented pioneers and the righteously indignant ends-oriented militants. ... Our problem is the constant internal tension between means and ends."<sup>426</sup> CORE, with Farmer at the helm, was confronted with the ensuing battle between the "means-oriented idealists (pacifists), devoted to nonviolence," and the "ends-oriented militants (the angry young men), willing to discard nonviolence as a tactic." Initially, Farmer viewed this tension as positive for CORE. "Without the Young Turks the movement could never have grown to mass proportions, and without idealists it could not

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<sup>424</sup> Farmer to Alton Lemon, March 15, 1962, CORE Archives.

<sup>425</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 206-207.

<sup>426</sup> Farmer, National Director's Report to 1962 Convention in August Meier Papers.

have developed revolutionary dimensions. The anger of one without the disciplined idealism of the other could have produced only nihilism.”<sup>427</sup> Farmer recognized the importance of this new segment in CORE, but stressed that the organization would “stay nonviolent” because “it cannot succeed if it does not remain nonviolent.”<sup>428</sup> “I advocate keeping,” Farmer furthered declared, “that eye on the prize, or we risk as a minority the total loss of our identity and the loss of our movement itself in an avalanche of rusty words.”<sup>429</sup> Lincoln Lynch, chairman of Long Island CORE, echoed this position. He indicated that CORE’s strength was in its commitment to nonviolence and integration. “We realized,” Lynch, declared, “the chapter’s strength lay in people of divergent backgrounds working together [and] nationalism was never an overt issue in the chapter, but a covert issue. It was never a question of someone getting up and saying we did not need whites.”<sup>430</sup>

The initial tension Farmer defined as valuable for CORE proved more detrimental as 1962 ended. The ideological fracturing of CORE went beyond this tension, and the fragmentation of the organization proved more complicated than Farmer had initially thought. Fueling this tension, E.U. Essien-Udom, author of Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America, noted, was that “A century after the Emancipation, nineteen million black Americans, robbed of their traditions and of a pride in their past, are still seeking acceptance by the white majority but are continuing to live in semi-bondage on

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<sup>427</sup> Farmer, Connecticut Area Conference, December 13, 1963 at Schomburg Center, New York Public Library.

<sup>428</sup> Farmer, Connecticut Area Conference, December 13, 1963, CORE Archives.

<sup>429</sup> James Farmer, “The CORE Of It,” New York Amsterdam News, September 25, 1965.

<sup>430</sup> Interview with Lincoln Lynch, August 5, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

the fringes of American society.”<sup>431</sup> This semi-bondage caused psychological problems because, as Killian and Grigg emphasized, “the Negro American can neither forget that he is black nor be proud of it. The question that presses ...is whether Negroes in America will wait patiently while the slow, peaceful, democratic process of integration evolves.”<sup>432</sup> “There is little evidence,” Killian and Grigg furthered declared, “that white society will be willing to give up its sense of dominance without a struggle. Nor is there much evidence that white Americans are willing to make sufficient sacrifices to speed up the process of integration and overtake the increasing alienation of the masses of Negro Americans.”<sup>433</sup>

It was in this environment that CORE faced a threatening dichotomy. “We are in a time,” Paul Anthony, a member of Atlanta’s Southern Regional Conference, noted, “of great promise and great danger. ... Danger that Negroes will lose all faith in established institutions and will seek out other alternatives.”<sup>434</sup> Those other alternatives, such as Black Nationalism, became more alluring in 1964. For blacks in the urban North, the idea of black power was intriguing. As Stokely Carmichael declared, “the reason the Negro is in the position he’s in today is not because he’s not integrated, but because he doesn’t have power. Integration is an insidious subterfuge for white supremacy.”<sup>435</sup> These Black Nationalist ideas resonated with the new black CORE members. Militant northern CORE

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<sup>431</sup> E.U. Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962), 1.

<sup>432</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 109.

<sup>433</sup> Killian and Grigg, Racial Crisis, 109.

<sup>434</sup> Interview with Paul Anthony, March 9, 1966 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>435</sup> John Benson, “Interview with Stokely Carmichael,” *The Black Panther Party* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1966), 25.



members began to echo this sentiment. Rejecting the passivity of CORE's nonviolent integrated platform, one militant northern CORE member emphasized that,

There is a begging aspect of it I don't like. When I am walking out in front of a store I am essentially saying to people that I'm a Negro and Negroes are not treated well—will you please do something about it? I don't want to see myself quite like that—it's hard to find the words to use. I would rather see myself standing forth a man like any man and making certain I receive my due—nothing plaintive—no asking. When I am walking in front of a realtor's office, I still feel I am begging him. I would feel better if I could walk in and shove him out of the way and look at the listings—that, I would feel, would be being a man.<sup>436</sup>

Malcolm X, who broke away from the Nation of Islam in 1964 and formed the Organization for Afro-American Unity, still promoted Black Nationalism as a means of gaining political and psychological strength. He implored blacks to stop looking toward their white counterparts for the solution to their problems. He emphasized that blacks were not Americans but victims of Americanism and that Black Nationalism, not nonviolence was the correct “reaction to racism.”<sup>437</sup> “If we react,” Malcolm declared, “to white racism with a violent reaction, to me that's not black racism. If you come to put a rope around my neck and I hang you for it, to me that's not racism. My reaction is the reaction of a human being reacting to defend himself and protect himself.”<sup>438</sup>

A combination of increased ghetto/community organization and Malcolm's Black Nationalism rhetoric furthered weakened white involvement and influence in CORE. Farmer even began to reevaluate the direction of CORE. “Must we renounce,” Farmer

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<sup>436</sup> Bell, CORE, 114.

<sup>437</sup> Malcolm X, in George Breitman, editor, Malcolm X Speaks, ( New York: Merit Publishers, 1965), 22.

<sup>438</sup> Breitman, Malcolm X Speaks, 211-212.

declared, “ourselves and our community for the sake of integration?”<sup>439</sup> Farmer suggested, “Perhaps we ... were at fault for not knowing sooner that some form of nationalism, or group-ism or ethnocentrism-- there is a suitable name yet for this model I am trying to describe—can be incorporated into CORE’s inner life without fatally compromising its ultimate ideals.”<sup>440</sup> Farmer proposed a fragile alliance between the CORE of yesterday and the emerging CORE of 1964.

By 1965, this fragile alliance began to fracture. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Abromotitz, white members of New Haven CORE, recalled that by the spring of 1965 tensions between blacks and whites in the chapter were readily apparent. There was no longer the personal closeness or socializing between blacks and whites that had existed in 1963, when they joined the chapter.<sup>441</sup> Specifically, in New Haven CORE, Mr. and Mrs. Abromotitz noticed that whites were subtly driven out of the chapter, while Walter Brooks, the black vice-chairman of New Haven CORE, advocated “blacks running things.”<sup>442</sup>

San Francisco CORE, according to Inge and Duran Bell, experienced the “edging out of whites” as early as 1964. “Black nationalism,” according to the Bells, “was one of the main things which tore CORE apart.” The San Francisco chapter had had several discussions about Black Nationalism in 1962 and 1963. By 1964, the Bells recalled a sense of self-confidence on the part of blacks in the chapter. It was this self-confidence

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<sup>439</sup> James Farmer, Freedom When? (New York: Random House, 1965), 111.

<sup>440</sup> Farmer, Freedom, 96-97

<sup>441</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Abromotitz, August 1971 in August Meier Paper.

<sup>442</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Abromotitz, August 1971 in August Meier Papers.

that enabled blacks, influenced by Black Nationalism and community organization, to drive whites out of the chapter. The trend of blacks leading in the urban ghettos left little room for whites within CORE. The emerging attitude was that black CORE members did not need whites to be successful with campaigns and initiatives.<sup>443</sup>

A revolutionary change took place in the social and political structure of CORE. Critical of whites and influenced by the Watts riot of 1965, to enhance self-defense, blacks in CORE envisioned organized power in black communities as the solution. Through organized black communities, CORE wanted to compel the American power structure to establish fundamental change among its politicians, labor leaders, and capitalists. CORE would organize and become the political voice, presence, and platform of the black poor. This new direction caused major debates within the organization. The house of CORE was now divided and the future of the organization was unknown. The direction, structure, and membership of CORE were under attack by new ideologies, strategies, and principles.<sup>444</sup> The divisiveness within the organization created a dilemma over the next several years between men and women who once had considered each other comrades in the fight for equality.

The first divisive debate centered on the practicality of using direct action to fight institutional racism. All across the North and West, chapters argued, internally and externally, over integrated or community organized direct action. Louis Smith, a Philadelphia CORE member, indicated that the split existed between those who supported action through the “street people” and those who supported CORE’s traditional direct

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<sup>443</sup> Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Abromotitz, August 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>444</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 374-376.

action platform.<sup>445</sup> The lines being drawn created an escalated tension within the organization. Philadelphia CORE belittled the use of ghetto community organization as futile social work. Robert Curvin of Newark CORE noted that “some CORE members, who suggested that CORE could go it alone, without whites, were self-defeating.”<sup>446</sup> In 1966 Walter Carter, ex-chairman of Baltimore CORE, who doubted the efficacy of this new community approach, led a faction in a direct action housing campaign. Columbus CORE, in 1964, was heavily divided over this issue. Mike Lesser, national field secretary, found the chapter split between two agendas and leaders. Arthur Zebbs, former chairman of Columbus CORE, led the faction committed to integration of schools through direct action. Marlene Wilson, however, found support within the chapter for working in the poverty-stricken ghettos.<sup>447</sup> Wilson’s faction, with the support of Lesser, prevailed and began to organize the neighborhoods.

Harlem CORE experienced internal factionalism as well in 1963 and 1964. Following the Harlem riots of 1964, the tension between blacks and whites intensified. According to Doris Innis, there was the growing debate over who could relate to the man in the street. The Blyden Jackson faction consisted of white leftists who would have street-corner meetings to connect with the people. This faction believed, according to Mike Lesser a Harlem CORE member, that “leadership should be all-black in order to build a movement in Harlem.”<sup>448</sup> The Clarence Funnye faction believed in integration and had a large white component. Roy Innis’s faction discredited integration as valuable

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<sup>445</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 377.

<sup>446</sup> Interview with Robert Curvin, July 31, 1966 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>447</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 377.

<sup>448</sup> Interview with Mike Lesser, Spring 1967 in August Meier Papers.

and promoted a Black Nationalist platform within Harlem CORE. The political infighting pitted Harlem CORE members against each other, with Roy Innis's black nationalist faction winning out. By 1964, according to Doris Innis, blacks lashing out at whites in the chapter would say "why don't you go home."<sup>449</sup>

In Cincinnati, the division within the chapter manifested itself differently. While the argumentative point was the same, the two debating groups differed. In 1964, young white youths found themselves at odds with the middle-class black leadership in the chapter. These white youths condemned, according to Meier and Rudwick, the black leadership's "resistance to working in the slums ...because it is something they have recently escaped from and because community organization work is fetish of the white kids who have alienated them."<sup>450</sup> This middle-class black leadership historically generated traditional CORE campaigns and initiatives. The white radical youths compelled Cincinnati CORE to reevaluate its campaigns and initiatives. By late 1964 and 1965, the black leadership of Cincinnati CORE, combined community organization and direct action initiatives successfully.<sup>451</sup>

Increasingly, CORE chapters perceived that community organization was the solution to problems blacks faced in the United States. The idea of connecting with the urban black core was a constant topic of debate within CORE chapters in the North and West. Berkeley, Denver, Newark, Syracuse, Detroit, and New Haven CORE all strived to establish a connection with blacks in the urban core. Berkeley, through its job

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<sup>449</sup> Interview with Doris Innis, October 12, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>450</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 377.

<sup>451</sup> Cincinnati CORE combined community organization and direct action protest in its 1964-1965 rent strike and mass demonstrations for building trade jobs.

demonstrations, tried to connect with the black community in Oakland.<sup>452</sup> Denver established its Freedom House in the city's poorest areas to stimulate black growth in the chapter. Newark tried to establish a strong poor black contingent in its City Hall demonstration against police brutality. Syracuse's Niagara Mohawk initiative recruited grass-roots blacks from Rochester to help with the demonstration.<sup>453</sup> Both Detroit and New Haven CORE found small numbers of poor blacks from the community joining the chapters.<sup>454</sup> Overall, Berkeley, Denver, Newark, Syracuse, Detroit, and New Haven did not have overwhelming success penetrating the urban core of cities.<sup>455</sup> By late 1964, according to James McCain, CORE's director of organization, "The Negro community, especially the lower economic segment, has been untouched by CORE."<sup>456</sup> Farmer even noted at the 1965 convention, "If we are honest we will admit that most [chapters] have failed" to penetrate into and organize the black community.<sup>457</sup>

This initial failure only invigorated these chapters' commitment to black community organization. This determination coupled with a growing disdain for integration resulted in a new directive for several northern and western CORE chapters. The initial rationale for community organization was to address major issues faced by blacks in the community. Now, the rationale for community organization, according to an

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<sup>452</sup> Interview with Charles Sellers, September, 1969 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>453</sup> Interview with Mrs. Freel in August Meier Papers.

<sup>454</sup> Interview with Selma Goode, September 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>455</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 378.

<sup>456</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 378.

<sup>457</sup> James Farmer, in August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, and Francis Broderick, editors Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971) 463.

unidentified black CORE leader, was “to develop a base and get power to change things.”<sup>458</sup> This new directive had the potential, which frightened traditionalist CORE members, of becoming a black power and separatist platform. This community organization directive became the “New Directions” of CORE and the movement. CORE traditionalists believed that this directive harmed the organization because of how CORE chapters defined black separatism and black power. CORE traditionalists feared that followers of these “New Directions” would not embrace the true meaning of black power. A CORE position paper on black power noted that black power had been “twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,” to believe that black power meant violence and racism.<sup>459</sup> Rather, CORE traditionalists argued,

It [black power] does not mean black separatism or the Black Muslims’ approach. It means an honest recognition of the beauty of blackness and negritude, and an understanding of African history; and awareness of Negro culture and history within the American heritage, and a dedication to help create a new society rather than welcome Negroes into first-class citizenship in the old. It is further understood that Negro contributions will be as fundamentally important as white ones in the new creation.<sup>460</sup>

The CORE position paper further suggested, according to Inge Bell, that “black power was merely a slogan asserting the right of Negro Americans to do what all other groups in society had done.”<sup>461</sup> The paper argued:

It is singular that Black Americans, in the midst of their own revolution, have been made the subject of a new kind of ridicule and hatred emanating from our desire to do, at last, what the white community has always asked us to do—grab

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<sup>458</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 379.

<sup>459</sup> “Congress of Racial Equality: Statement of Position on Black Power,” 1, CORE Archives.

<sup>460</sup> “Congress of Racial Equality: Statement of Position on Black Power, 1-2.

<sup>461</sup> Bell, CORE, 187.

our bootstraps, consolidate our political power and act in the framework of this democracy to change our own lives. This is Black Power—a concept as old as the first American immigrant who sought to share in the government of this land. As old as John Fitzgerald of Boston, Massachusetts, who built a base of political power that placed his grandson in the White House.<sup>462</sup>

Farmer envisioned a black community embracing an uplifting black power that unified people. As he suggested in his weekly editorial *The CORE Of It*, “CORE is now deadly serious in its efforts to mount Freedom Democratic Movements throughout this country, movements which will represent black power addressed to black questions, mobilized outside the usual political alignments.” Farmer weaved black power and nationalism into a larger equality context that emphasized freedom and social change.<sup>463</sup> Farmer’s definition of black power was cohesively in line with CORE’s traditional principles of interracialism, nonviolence, and direct action.

Not everyone interpreted black power and separatism in the same way. Roy Innis was a prime example of a diverging interpretation. Innis, as New York CORE chairman, put in place a “black male caucus” that excluded white members from policy making in the chapter. CORE traditionalists feared these types of actions would become the norm under the “New Directions.” Innis’s New York CORE chapter represented the type of black power and separatism that became skeptical of white participation. The white liberal came to be defined, according to Lerone Bennett, Jr. as,

A man who finds himself defined as a white man, as an oppressor, in short, and retreats from that designation. But—and this is essential—he retreats only halfway, disavowing the title without giving up the privileges. The fundamental trait of the white liberal is his desire to differentiate himself psychologically from white Americans in the issue of race. He wants to think and he wants others to

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<sup>462</sup> “Congress of Racial Equality: Statement of Position on Black Power,” 4.

<sup>463</sup> James Farmer, “The CORE Of It,” New York Amsterdam News, June 19, 1965.



think he is a man of brotherhood. The white liberal talks brotherhood; he writes about it, prays for it, and honors it. But: *Between the idea and the reality; Between the motion and the act; Falls the shadow.* ... The white liberal is Andrew Johnson saying to Negroes in 1864, 'I will be your Moses,' and taking, in 1865 the posture of Pharaoh. He is Abraham Lincoln biting his lip, as he put it, and keeping silent. The white liberal is the man who was not there in Montgomery and Little Rock and Birmingham; the white liberal is the man who is never there. The liberal, as Saul Alinsky, the brilliant white radical said, is the man who leaves the meeting when the fight begins. ... This is the white liberal: a man of Shadows, a friend of freedom who pauses, calculates, hesitates, [and] as a result his reputation in the Negro community is at an all-time low.<sup>464</sup>

Now the white man and woman, whether liberal or not, now according to David Cohen, a white Cleveland CORE member, "had the skin color of the enemy."<sup>465</sup> This perception of a white liberal pitted blacks against their white counterparts in CORE. With this attitude becoming the norm rather than the exception, where did that leave the "white CORE brothers and sisters?" Brooklyn and the Bronx CORE chapters, which were extremely influential amongst other CORE chapters, responded by redefining the role of whites in the organization to strictly supportive.<sup>466</sup> Marlene Wilson of Columbus CORE echoed this move by restricting white participation to typing and research.<sup>467</sup>

The perception of white paternalism also contributed to whites losing influential positions and status in CORE. White office holders, decision makers, and leaders became obsolete in many CORE chapters because, as one black CORE member declared, "Whatever whites did would be interpreted as paternalistic"<sup>468</sup> Richard Haley of Harlem

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<sup>464</sup> Bennett, Negro Mood, 77-78.

<sup>465</sup> Interview with David Cohen, December 19, 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>466</sup> Interview with Robert Curvin, September 17, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>467</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 381.

<sup>468</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 381.

CORE witnessed the same white paternalism during the early 1960's. Marvin Rich, CORE's communications director, was a charismatic and sophisticated leader who held a tremendous amount of decision-making power in CORE. While Haley respected Rich's acumen, other black CORE members came to despise Rich's decision-making authority. Black resentment of Rich, according to Meier and Rudwick, existed because of his white paternalistic nature. Rich had the attitude, Meier and Rudwick noted, that "you are all nice people, but I am the decision maker. Because you are nice we will discuss, and I will not always insist that my decision be adopted, but by and large you will find that I am right."<sup>469</sup> The notion that Rich was "pulling the strings" became a point of contention for black CORE members.<sup>470</sup> By the spring of 1965, Harlem CORE was overwhelmingly black with whites in less visible roles.

White leaders in Bergen County, New Jersey CORE confronted the same type of backlash from black CORE members. Blacks within the chapter believed that they could only identify effectively with "ghetto" people. "We felt whites," according to Shirley Lacey, "had to play a new role. Whites felt they were working with us. We felt they should be working for us. We wanted the success to be ours ...to win our own battles. If there were any mistakes, we should make them. We felt that whites should have no voice, ...that they should run the mimeograph machines, ...but should not work in the ghetto."<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Interview with Richard Haley, April 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>470</sup> Interview with Richard Haley, April 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>471</sup> Interview with Shirley Lacey, December 16, 1970 in August Meier Papers.

By the 1966 national CORE convention in Baltimore, there was a strong change in tone towards whites. There was no longer a tolerance for whites. “People were no longer saying,” according to Rosenfeld, “that we have too many whites in office; instead they were saying, we have too many honkies around here.”<sup>472</sup> Blacks perceived the role of whites in CORE as inhibiting them and the organization. In the Detroit CORE chapter, “You are white and so you don’t understand” became a staple in heated debates between whites and blacks that exacerbated the racial polarization.<sup>473</sup> White CORE members were reduced in some, but not all, CORE chapters to being followers and supporters; a far cry from the leaders they began as in 1942.<sup>474</sup> In Brooklyn CORE, according to Meier and Rudwick, as late as December of 1964, “five of the fifteen members of the chapter’s executive board were white ... and were limited to the essentially housekeeping posts of financial and recording secretary.”<sup>475</sup> Even with diversity on the issue of white participation, the transitional trend was clear. Restricting white participation was becoming the standard, but more alarming was the demand in

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<sup>472</sup> Interview with Ralph Rosenfeld, July 9-10, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>473</sup> Interview with Ralph Rosenfeld, July 9-10, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>474</sup> As this transition was taking place in CORE chapters like Detroit and Columbus—to name a few—it is worth noting that not all CORE chapters and their black members defined whites in this new role as supporter and follower. CORE chapters still existed that had a balance between white and black membership and leadership. There also were chapters that still had an overwhelmingly higher percentage of whites. In addition, extreme diversity existed in CORE chapters that did limit white participation. Some wanted complete exclusion of white participants, while others just wanted to restrict the actions of white participants.

<sup>475</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 382.

some CORE chapters for the complete exclusion and removal of whites from the organization.<sup>476</sup>

The limitation of white participation in CORE chapters was diverse and so too was the reaction of white CORE members to this limitation. While some agreed with this new position taken by black CORE members, others responded with great astonishment. Whites in Seattle CORE, Mrs. Freel, a Seattle CORE member recalled, in response to the limitation and exclusion of whites, declared, “after all I’ve done for CORE, after how hard I worked in this chapter ... after all that, you want to throw me in the trashcan.”<sup>477</sup> Selma Goode of Detroit CORE noted that whites firmly did not back down or out of leadership positions as early as 1961. The predominantly white chapter in 1961 argued that “CORE doesn’t mean anything if it was not both for blacks and whites. It is not a black white fight.” By 1965, the fractured Detroit chapter agreed that “whites should not dominate survey teams [in the black community],” but rather the white member should be quiet.<sup>478</sup> White members could still participate and exert influence, but Detroit CORE emphasized that one of the chapter’s goal was to develop black leadership.<sup>479</sup> This new position prompted Selma Goode to accept the position of research chairman and gather information that black CORE members and leaders used to fight against institutional racism.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 382.

<sup>477</sup> Interview with Mrs. Freel in August Meier Papers.

<sup>478</sup> Interview with Selma Goode, September 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>479</sup> The perception was developing black leadership would lead to blacks having better say and control over their lives.

<sup>480</sup> Don Roberts, who appointed Ms. Goode to this position, emphasized that such a position was a good role for a white member to play in the organization.

White members within San Fernando Valley CORE took a masochist stance in self-limiting the role of whites in the organization. While in a “group therapy” session, a white member recalled, “We had lots of white masochists—I remember one who got up and said, ‘Every time I look in the mirror, I see that I’m white and I feel guilty. I can never know what it is like to be black.’ Much of the time at meetings was taken up with oral confessions.”<sup>481</sup> A white female member of the Marin County, California, CORE echoed this same sentiment. While attending a CORE conference in Los Angeles, she declared that, after spending three days in the ghetto, “beyond the [poverty] I found something else. Truth. There does not seem to be the need for glamour or falseness that is so obvious in the white world. This truth and honesty are everywhere, in the food, the music, in the talk, and in the faces of the people. ...Through all the things I saw and felt during those three days I have some strong feelings regarding the white role in the Civil Rights Movement. My feeling is that the role of whites should be one of almost silence.”<sup>482</sup> Syracuse CORE member Ronald Corwin believed a white person should not set strategies or make decisions on tactics for blacks. “When it comes,” Corwin recalled, “to the politics of wheeling and dealing in the ghetto, whites are a liability.” Even with his talents to lead and organize, Corwin still recognized that he did not completely understand the desperation that blacks endured. Whether social, economic, or racial, this disconnect for Corwin hindered CORE and the movement.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> San Fernando Valley CORE, “Activities, Needs, and General Progress, June-July, 1965,” Wiley Papers; and Robert Bailey, “Why My Chapter Failed,” November 27, 1965, Genevieve Hughes Houghton Papers CORE Archives; Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 383.

<sup>482</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 383.

<sup>483</sup> Interview with Ronald Corwin, July 3, 1964, June 29, 1971 and September 23, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

The sentiments of betrayal, shock, masochism, and romanticism did not stop the inevitable flight of many white members from their respective CORE chapters. In 1967 Selma Goode, research chairman for Detroit CORE, left the organization when the chapter chairman claimed that she “was the symbol of what was wrong ... [she] was the white middle class bitch from the suburbs.”<sup>484</sup> White men and women, like Selma Goode, grew tired of the snide remarks, the limited involvement, and the devaluing of their contributions to CORE.<sup>485</sup>

Black members from these CORE chapters did not fight the exodus of white members, and they welcomed the influx of new black members. CORE’s membership in its Baltimore, Columbus, New York (Harlem), San Francisco, Berkley, Syracuse, Boston, Long Island, Washington, Detroit and New Haven chapters was either overwhelmingly or slightly more black by 1965. Black leadership, whether separatist in nature, became popular within these chapters in the mid-1960’s. There were consequences of the white exodus and new directions of these chapters. Quite often, the organizational, financial, and manpower stability of the chapter collapsed when whites left these chapters.

It was no secret that national CORE and its chapters relied heavily on white financial support. Marvin Rich, one of CORE’s lead fund-raisers, netted 95%—nearly a half a million dollars—of CORE’s income from a list of primarily white donators.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Interview with Selma Goode, September 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>485</sup> There was internal factionalism within Detroit CORE. This resulted in the chapter having about 50-60 members by 1966—40% being white. This number would drop to 20 by 1967. The mass exodus of white members occurred in July of 1967 prior to and immediately following the Detroit riot. According to Ms. Goode, when the riot was over there was one remaining white Detroit CORE member.

<sup>486</sup> Conversation with Marvin Rich, March 1967 in August Meier Papers.

“Little money,” according to James Peck, “came from blacks.”<sup>487</sup> The physical exodus of white members meant depletion in funds for the chapters.

This financial dilemma was further complicated by the instability in organization and manpower in these chapters. For instance, San Francisco CORE, which forced out much of its white membership and leadership by 1964, found a tapering off of initiative oriented activity. Berkeley CORE, according to Charles Sellers, had a hard time maintaining the chapter because white members had done this. White members, because of their educational background, monopolized speeches, picketing, and negotiations. The chapter gradually shriveled away over the next couple of years.<sup>488</sup>

For the Bergen County, New Jersey, CORE chapter, the organization “died,” Shirley Lacey laughingly declared, “soon after the blacks took over.” For New Haven CORE, where whites staffed most of the jobs, organized work in greater numbers, and negotiated with city officials, “things,” according to Mr. and Mrs. Abromotitz, “stopped happening after whites left.”<sup>489</sup> Losing the white contingent, financially and as contributing members, caused irrevocable damage to these CORE chapters. The malaise of CORE chapters like San Francisco, Berkeley, and Bergen County, New Jersey intensified the racial polarization that came to be consumed by Black Nationalism and separatism.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Interview with James Peck, December 14, 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>488</sup> Interview with Jed Rakoff, August 1971; Inge and Duran Bell, August 28, 1969; Gene Hughes Houghton, April 1960; Charles Sellers, September, 1969 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>489</sup> Interview with Shirley Lacey, December 16, 1970; Mr. and Mrs. Abromotitz, August 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>490</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 385.

CORE chapters that had a slight white or slight black majority approached the divisive nature of racial polarization differently. For instance, both the Cleveland and Boston CORE chapters gave little relevance to the black and white issue. Cleveland CORE, 70% black in membership by 1964, discussed the tensions that existed between whites and blacks in the chapter. Ruth Turner, a committed nationalist member of the Cleveland chapter, made sure that the tension never escalated to a confrontation. Turner and the chapter committed themselves to getting things done, and thus set any combative relationships to the periphery.<sup>491</sup>

Chairman Lincoln Lynch of Long Island CORE emphasized that black leadership was always implicit but never explicit. “We tried,” Lynch recalled, “to push blacks with any degree of leadership into positions of leadership. It was a covert situation, never a overt, but we all recognized it.”<sup>492</sup> Alan Gartner, chairman of Boston CORE, perceived the predominantly black chapter as having fewer black and white tensions than elsewhere. Several reasons contributed to blacks and whites working well together in the chapter, Gartner recalled:

1. The successes on substantive issues, thus with something to do there is no time for in fighting.
2. Boston had a greater history of interracial cooperation on these issues and in many ways it was a less segregated city.
3. There were strong blacks committed to interracial structure
4. Alan’s own sensitivity, though he was careful to say this was limited by his whiteness.
5. Finally, when there was a fight in the community, Boston CORE would be on the more militant ,or blacker, side.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Interview with David Cohen, December 19, 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>492</sup> Interview with Lincoln Lynch, August 5, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>493</sup> Interview with Alan Gartner, April 29, 1971 in August Meier Papers.



On the other hand, Washington CORE, which had a slight white majority by 1964, was plagued with black and white tension. By late 1966, Ethebert Haskins recalled, overwhelming support surfaced for “not having white liberal leadership.” Mary Coleman, chairman of Washington CORE, believed that because of the hostility towards whites, their days in CORE were numbered. Black chairman Roena Rand gave validation to Coleman’s belief when she stressed racial separatism within the chapter. Rand, along with Gladys Harrington, chairman of New York CORE, wanted blacks to run their own organization.<sup>494</sup>

St. Louis CORE echoed this racial polarization within its chapter. St. Louis CORE came to despise white leaders like Eugene Tenour and Charles Oldham. The intense factionalism in 1963 destroyed the once tight-knit chapter. “We were sort of one big happy family,” according to St. Louis CORE member Wesley Hornsby. “We were almost a social club as much as an action group.” In the early days, Walter Hayes recalled, “There were no factions; it was a very closely knit group. We knew each other well, and perhaps we socialized too much....” By 1963, blacks and whites in St. Louis CORE were on opposite sides and white membership dwindled to twenty percent.<sup>495</sup>

Tension continued to escalate throughout 1964 and 1965 in northern and western chapters. A leading contributor to the tension was the disparity in education between white and black CORE members. Community organizing brought a new social class of blacks to several CORE chapters. Many of these new black members were young blue-collar workers with far less education than their white CORE counterparts. A level of

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<sup>494</sup> Interview with Ethebert Haskins; Mary Coleman, April 1972 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>495</sup> Interview with Wesley Hornsby, October 1965; Walter Hayes, October 1965 in August Meier Papers.

distrust and hostility existed that escalated into an anti-white mentality. A New York Times survey of New York City blacks helped to explain this anti-white sentiment.

Responding to the question:

“HOW DO YOU THINK MOST NEGROES FEEL ABOUT WHITES?”,

sixty-three percent of New York City blacks said they did not hate whites, but they did not like them either.<sup>496</sup> The pattern of race relations changed, for the worst, within CORE.

As Gary T. Marx, author of Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community, explained:

Although the attitudes of white Americans toward Blacks may be becoming more favorable, the reverse is not necessarily true. While the differences are not large, as age decreases there is a tendency for anti-white sentiment to increase from 14 to 27 percent. When the effect of education is held constant, this tendency becomes more pronounced. Thus, among people with only a grammar school education, 47 percent of those under 29 scored as anti-white in contrast to 23 percent of those 60 and over. Among college educated, in the youngest group 20 percent scored as anti-white while none of the college educated over 60 did.<sup>497</sup>

From an educational perspective, blacks in CORE reflected the anti-white sentiment of the less educated black population or the twenty-nine-year-old with only a grammar school education.<sup>498</sup> In most CORE chapters, whites were better educated than blacks. St. Louis CORE, with a membership of 12 whites and 13 blacks in 1951, reflected this disparity. Of the 12 whites, nine had a college degree, while only two of the 13 blacks

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<sup>496</sup> Marx, Protest and Prejudice, 180.

<sup>497</sup> Marx, Protest and Prejudice, 185.

<sup>498</sup> Marx also contended that increase in occupation and income contributed to a lower anti-white sentiment among blacks. Blacks in CORE at the beginning were college-educated middle class.

had a college degree.<sup>499</sup> Wanda Penny, a black St. Louis CORE member, recognized this educational gap. “The whites,” Penny recalled, “were more articulate, and they guided the meetings, they seemed to know more about everything.”<sup>500</sup> Fewer blacks went to college, and compounding the educational differences was the fact that many blacks were products of segregated schools, and thus far less educated than whites.<sup>501</sup> This educational gap caused blacks, according to Gene Hughes Houghton of Berkeley CORE, “to take a back seat in negotiations on job projects.”<sup>502</sup> “As we went into school projects,” Houghton recalled, “the tactics which worked best—making speeches before city councils and school boards—were involving skills that whites largely monopolized—so that left more black members feeling like they were on the sidelines.”<sup>503</sup> This educational disparity contributed to the larger social and cultural disconnects. As Houghton explained, “Berkeley CORE had the most racism,” due largely to “the whites being middle class and the Negroes having lower status.”<sup>504</sup> “There was a psychological undercurrent,” according to Meier and Rudwick, “present in both whites and blacks that whites are better qualified or [educated] to lead.”<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Interview with Charles and Marian Oldham, September 20, 1965 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>500</sup> Interview with Wanda Penny, October 1965 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>501</sup> Interview with Charles and Marian Oldham, September 20, 1965 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>502</sup> Interview with Gene Hughes Houghton, April 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>503</sup> Interview with Gene Hughes Houghton, April 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>504</sup> Interview with Gene Hughes Houghton, April 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>505</sup> Notations in Rudwick’s Richard Haley Interview, April 1971 in August Meier Papers.

Another source of tension facing CORE during this period was the debate over whether to employ nonviolence or self-defense violence. The long commitment, by CORE, to nonviolence had become an unattractive liability. The uncertainty of using nonviolence increased as city riots and physical intimidation escalated across the nation.<sup>506</sup> Within CORE chapters as well as at the national level, the divisive debate over nonviolence versus self-defense violence intensified. A dichotomy existed that pitted an old CORE faction against a new CORE faction. The new CORE faction did not relate to nonviolence; it was a foreign philosophy that it just did not want to understand. Turning the other cheek and sustaining bodily injury was, according to Columbus CORE member Judy Sheerer, “a very alien motive operation since the whole lifestyle of the Negro community was so much more violence-oriented than that of the white middle class intellectuals.”<sup>507</sup> Ollie Leeds of Brooklyn CORE echoed this sentiment when he emphasized, “nonviolence was very unpopular in the black community, except among the church people, and we never recruited from among them anyhow.”<sup>508</sup>

The old CORE faction, with its pacifist roots, was committed to nonviolence as a guiding principle and not just as a useable tactic in campaigns and initiatives. These men and women, according to CORE’s Rules of Action, “met the anger of any individual or group with the spirit of good will and creative reconciliation: they submitted to assault and did not retaliate in kind either by act or word.”<sup>509</sup> This commitment, by both black and white CORE members, to a disciplined order was unwavering. The steadfast

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<sup>506</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 397.

<sup>507</sup> Interview with Benjamin and Judy Sheerer, March 12, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>508</sup> Interview with Ollie Leeds, April 28, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>509</sup> Bell, CORE, 196.

devotion was largely due to these members' commitment to the original goals and principals in CORE. Nonviolence paired well with the goal of reconciliation and the principle of integration in the early years of CORE. "In the old days," Charles Oldham of St. Louis CORE recalled, "there was a great emphasis on reconciliation—trying to get the discriminating person to change and trying to think of him as a friend."<sup>510</sup>

The new CORE ethos, though, believed integration and reconciliation had failed and thus nonviolence was futile and no longer useful. A shift in ideology took place in which, according to Marvin Rich, "traditional CORE philosophy became obscured."<sup>511</sup> Early members like George Houser, James Peck, and Bayard Rustin did not accept this shift in ideology. Rustin was quick to denounce any use of violence in CORE.<sup>512</sup> Even with Rustin's criticism, the fact remained that national CORE and its chapters began to redefine its meaning of nonviolence. There existed a vast gray area when defining nonviolence in CORE. On the one hand, according to Meier and Rudwick, nonviolence meant "the distinction between nonviolence as a way of life and nonviolence as a tactic on demonstrations; or the difference between violence as a weapon of self-defense against specific attacks, and the employment of violence as a strategy of offense."<sup>513</sup> What became evident was growing support for self-defense violence. In the early summer of 1966, Boston CORE's statement on the issue reflected this sentiment. The statement indicated that while Boston CORE "would remain committed to nonviolence, it would

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<sup>510</sup> Interview with Charles and Marian Oldham, September 20, 1965 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>511</sup> Interview with Marvin Rich, May 21, 1969 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>512</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 397.

<sup>513</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 397.

not criticize self defense by black people [because] Negroes had the unquestioned American right to defend their lives, their families, and their property.”<sup>514</sup> Ronnie Moore, Assistant Director of Organization in CORE, echoed this mentality when he stated, “I am and have always been in favor of self-defense of one’s home, but I have always held that direct action, which includes picketing, mass demonstrations, etc., must be nonviolent. For philosophical reasons must not only this exist, but also it must exist for practical reasons. I know the reality of nonviolence because I have worked in the South and I have inhaled tear gas. I have witnessed police brutality; I have ducked bullets therefore, I knew when it was wise to pick up guns and when it was wise to be nonviolent.”<sup>515</sup>

Nonviolence came to represent weakness for many blacks in CORE. “Many of the blacks in CORE,” Gene Hughes Houghton declared, “did not want to be in a position of [weakness]. They wanted to yell at the employers, not negotiate or beg. They didn’t want to do anything cautious to make them look weak. It was not that the blacks were more militant in CORE; it was that they would counsel things like breaking a window faster”<sup>516</sup> This mindset contributed to the deterioration of nonviolence in CORE and its chapters.

Northern CORE chapters, according Richard Haley of Harlem CORE, began to view nonviolence as a tactic rather than a principled ideology. In 1965 Lincoln Lynch, chairman of Long Island CORE who had, tired of the violence against blacks, declared that “the bigots will learn that we’re going to stop turning the other cheek. Nonviolence is

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<sup>514</sup> Notes from Phyllis Ryan Papers in August Meier Papers.

<sup>515</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 399-400.

<sup>516</sup> Interview with Gene Hughes Houghton, April 1970 in August Meier Papers.

coming to an end.”<sup>517</sup> In February of that year, Lynch further stressed not only that CORE demonstrators needed to defend themselves against physical attack but also that CORE should “re-examine and redefine” its nonviolent position.<sup>518</sup> Self-defense became a staple within many CORE chapters, while nonviolence lost its viability. Peck attributed this shift from nonviolence to self-defense violence to the decline in the popularity of nonviolence. “People wanted,” Peck declared, “something new. They wanted things to go faster. ... Nonviolent direct action was no longer fashionable and perceived as not working.”<sup>519</sup> Even with this perception, Farmer made it clear that CORE would remain a nonviolent organization devoted to racial integration and equality.

By 1966, the new CORE and its members had rejected all that had come before. “Integration was passé,” according Janice Rosenfeld; “people thought they would do things differently and thus really do something important and be successful. The attitude toward whites on the part of the blacks who were becoming active by 1965 had a strong element of contempt for what had gone before, a contempt for experience.”<sup>520</sup> Norman Seay, an early CORE member, echoed this sentiment:

There was little factionalism in the old days. We had a common problem to solve together, and it was more severe, coping with all the discrimination we found, as compared to now. So we banded together. Today, Negroes have more freedom and more freedom means they have more experiences, and more different views, thus making for possibility of factions. Also, more experiences means a greater eagerness to assert leadership, and so clashes.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 399.

<sup>518</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 399.

<sup>519</sup> Interview with James Peck, December 14, 1970 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>520</sup> Interview with Ralph and Janice Rosenfeld, July 9-10, 1971 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>521</sup> Interview with Norman Seay in August Meier Papers.

These clashes triggered distrust and questioning of traditional directives and actions within CORE. William Bradley, San Francisco CORE chairman, noted that “Equality and integration are not the same thing. I never interpreted blacks and whites together to mean that blacks and whites do everything together.” For Bradley, according to Meier and Rudwick, “Integration [was] a dirty word.”<sup>522</sup> The key tenets that gave early CORE its substance were no longer accepted. The 1966 CORE convention reflected this rejection of CORE’s traditional integration and nonviolent principles. Replacing these old principles were Black Nationalism and separatism, retaliatory violence, and removing whites from the organization. The shift in ideology escalated further after the convention and firmly cemented the new direction of CORE.

By 1967 Floyd McKissick replaced Farmer as executive director, and unlike Farmer, McKissick embraced black power, which influenced his leadership.<sup>523</sup> For McKissick the Civil Rights Movement was over and in its place was the “black revolution.” Under McKissick’s leadership the new aim for CORE chapters was “black power for black people.”<sup>524</sup> “I do not believe,” McKissick declared, “that nonviolent demonstrations are the answer to the problems of the black people. The nation does not respond to nonviolent demonstrations.”<sup>525</sup> CORE, under the direction of its executive director, had embraced black power and discarded nonviolence as a viable option.

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<sup>522</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 387.

<sup>523</sup> McKissick explored new directions and agendas for CORE as early as 1966. This pursuit continued after he became executive director of CORE. It was McKissick who invited Black Muslims to speak at the 1966 CORE convention.

<sup>524</sup> New York Amsterdam News, July 15, 1967.

<sup>525</sup> New York Amsterdam News, August 26, 1967.



“Early CORE,” according to George Houser, “was color-blind.”<sup>526</sup> While Houser recognized the white and black ratio within Chicago CORE, he never believed it to be an issue. Motivating factors may have differed, with whites tending to be more pacifists. Houser, though, firmly believed that little tension or hostility existed within CORE. The organization would remain disciplined by and devoted to the original purpose put in place in 1942. In 1945, CORE adapted a constitution that stipulated a firm purpose for the organization. CORE and its members believed the purpose of the organization shall be to federate local interracial groups working to abolish the color line through direct nonviolent action; and to give a voice nationally to their convictions on current issues.<sup>527</sup> Over the next twenty years, CORE amended its constitution and purpose. With each amendment, CORE moved away from its traditional principles and toward its new identity. The first amending of that purpose was in 1956. CORE and its members agreed that the purpose of the organization shall be to federate local groups, preferably interracial, working to abolish the color line through direct, nonviolent action and to give voice nationally to their convictions on human relations.<sup>528</sup> CORE made two more changes in its purpose between 1960 and 1966:

1960 purpose— CORE is a national membership organization with affiliated local groups, preferably interracial, working to abolish discrimination based on skin color, race, religion or national origin, and stressing direct nonviolent action. It shall represent the groups nationally and give voice to their convictions and to those of its national associate (contributing) members.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Interview with George Houser, December 1967 in August Meier Papers.

<sup>527</sup> 1945 Constitution of the Congress of Racial Equality, CORE Archives.

<sup>528</sup> July 1, 1956 Amended Constitution of the Congress of Racial Equality, CORE Archives.

<sup>529</sup> 1960 Constitution of the Congress of Racial Equality, CORE Archives.

1966 purpose— The purpose for which this organization has been formed and for which it exists is to abolish racial discrimination and all resulting inequalities based upon skin color, class, race, religion, or national origin, stressing nonviolent, direct-action methods, political and economic methods, and community organization.<sup>530</sup>

The changes were subtle, but the impact of these changes was monumental. The first purpose was clear and to the point. Complication free, that initial purpose implied that everyone was welcome who wanted to achieve the goal of abolishing the color line. By 1966, CORE had added distinctive layers that convoluted the goal of erasing the color line. CORE opened Pandora's door to the new ethos that was not color-blind, but rather filled with hostility, animosity and frustration. "It was something that came about," Gene Hughes Houghton recalled, "because of frustration and rage. It was based on a feeling that we weren't getting anywhere."<sup>531</sup> Frustration became a key component in the new direction of CORE. Black CORE members who embraced Black Nationalism, the removal of whites, and retaliatory violence were tired of the minor victories and successes. They no longer believed they could attain meaningful equality under the old traditional principles and ideas of CORE. Black power, separatism, the removal of whites, and retaliatory violence were all a part of a new era for CORE. For blacks this era encompassed power, prosperity, and fundamental change. Blacks within CORE willingly accepted this new day and season.

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<sup>530</sup> 1966 Constitution of the Congress of Racial Equality, CORE Archives.

<sup>531</sup> Interview with Gene Hughes Houghton, April 1970 in August Meier Papers.

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